

Denbighshire Record Office: Preservation Strategy

Denbighshire Record Office's preservation mission statement

The principal duty of the Denbighshire Record Office is to preserve the documentary heritage in its care for future generations whilst enabling and promoting access by the public. In pursuing this end the Archives Services aims to protect the documents, as far as is possible, from physical deterioration and to store them in a safe and secure environment.

Introduction

The following preservation policy will enable the Service to fulfill its obligations to the above statement, as well as its statutory requirements to preserve public records (Public Records Acts 1958, 1967) and local authority records (Local Government Act 1972, and Local Government (Wales) Act 1994). It will assist managerial direction in justifying any future measures deemed necessary for the protection of the documents; assist with grant applications to help fund such measures; enable more efficient use of limited conservation resources; provide standards and procedures to measure performance; and highlight the constraints, for example, on public access necessary to ensure the continued availability of the documents to present and future generations.

General

The County Archivist and Heritage Officer receives a delegated budget specifically for the archives service within which a sum should be dedicated to preservation and conservation issues. The service employs professionally-qualified archivists and others trained by them on preservation matters. There are no in-house conservation facilities provided. Conservation advice and services are obtained from outside agencies and commercial businesses .

The Archive Service has subscribed to the Standard published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission (Culture and Arts sub-committee minutes 7 May 1997) and has received provisional TNA (National Archives) approval for the standard of its accommodation for archives

The County Archivist and Heritage Officer is responsible for managing and reviewing the preservation policy, and for ensuring that staff are aware of their own preservation responsibilities and how they can contribute to the success of the policy.

Contents

1. Acquisition and selection for preservation.
2. Environmental conditions.
3. Storage and packaging.
4. Training and user awareness.
5. Use of archives.
6. Conservation.
7. Housekeeping.
8. Preservation copying.
9. Disaster planning.
10. Security.
11. Exhibitions.
12. Finding-aids.

1. Acquisition and selection for preservation

All acquisitions will be according to the approved service Collection Policy and decisions taken regarding the selection of archival materials for permanent retention will be made by professional staff capable of making accurate and reasonable assessments as to their archival value.

They will, as soon as possible after reception, decide:

- Whether or not the item is worthy of preservation
- To report the document(s) in need of conservation if necessary and restrict public access in the interim
- if the item(s) should be copied and the original discarded
- if a surrogate copy should be made for public consultation and the item conserved
- on the preservation priority of any documents requiring attention bearing in mind factors of organizational, local, regional and national significance; level of demand by public; availability of funding; condition/fragility of the item; availability of expertise
- in the case of duplication if all copies are to be preserved and if whether physical condition/format etc. influences the decision

Documents already held in the archive will be identified and prioritized for preservation and conservation by means of:

- collection surveys
- records of use, drawing attention to most frequently requested items
- observation as items are produced from storage for public consultation

Suitable transport to the Record Office from the depositor/donor will be arranged and, as soon as possible after reception professional staff will:

- check the condition of documents, remove any metal clips and staples, and excessive dirt and dust
- isolate in appropriate accommodation documents which are damp or contaminated with fungal growth or insect infestation, or which are otherwise in a condition which could adversely effect environmental conditions and other documents
- accession the items to enable location and retrieval

A formal receipt is sent to the depositor indicating that he/she agrees to the Record Office's conditions of deposit of archive material. Large and important collections merit specific loan agreements signed on behalf of the archive and by, or on behalf of, the depositor outlining the terms under which documents may be deposited as loans.

2. Environmental conditions

Unless archival materials are stored in suitable environments and storage conditions their condition will deteriorate. Maintaining suitable temperature and relative humidity (RH) levels is crucial: excessive heat and humidity will accelerate the chemical deterioration of materials, such as paper and parchment, while conditions which are too dry can weaken glues.

Environmental stability is also extremely important, and wide ranges of temperature and RH, especially in storage areas, must be avoided. Excessive heat and humidity in search rooms, however, must also be avoided as far as it is practicable and feasible to do so.

These conditions will be achieved in the Denbighshire Record Office by:

- Monitoring ambient conditions of temperature and humidity continuously in all areas

- Keeping ambient conditions cool and dry but not too dry (BS5454 recommends temperature and humidity ranges of 13°-18°C and 55%-65% Relative Humidity (RH) for storing paper and parchment)
- Keeping fluctuations in temperature and RH to a minimum
- Ensuring good ventilation and air circulation to prevent mould growth
- Avoiding light and not using artificial lighting in storage areas unless necessary for retrieving or returning documents
- Controlling dust and air pollutants by air filtration

3. Storage and packaging

Care in providing suitable ambient conditions for the storage of documents will be matched by that given to the method of storage.

This will be achieved by ensuring that:

- There is sufficient space available for the safe storage of all documents and room for growth in excess of 15%.
- All storage areas are structurally sound so as to minimize the risk of damage from adverse weather conditions.
- All storage areas are protected, as far as is practicable, from fire, flood and other hazards by installing automatic fire suppression and detection systems, by not having water pipes or radiators in strong room areas and having suitable fire-extinguishers and other emergency equipment to hand.
- All storage areas are safe and secure from insect and vermin infestation.
- All storage areas are safe and secure from the risk of theft or vandalism by the installation of an electronic access policy for authorized staff, intruder alarms and closed-circuit television.

- The location of any item removed from storage is known at all times. Any suspected loss or theft will be reported and investigated immediately.
- The physical condition of any item being removed from, or returned to, storage is assessed, and any damage reported appropriately.
- Cellulose nitrate film is not kept in the archive.
- Framed items will be stored flat with nothing else on top of them.
- Large volumes and boxes are stored flat with no more than two or three volumes or boxes on top of one another.
- Plans and maps are stored flat or rolled with no unprotected rolled maps or plans on top of each other.

This will be supported by the use of suitable packaging materials and good practice:

- Archival quality boxes with non-rusting staples and well-fitting lids.
- Archival quality paper or card for enveloping or wrapping documents.
- Clear inert polyester or sulphur-free (silver-safe) paper for enveloping or wrapping photographs.
- Documents are tied loosely in bundles with unbleached cotton tape (not string), and placed in folders or boxes.
- Heavy boxes are labeled as such.
- Volumes with damaged spines and/or loose pages are tied with unbleached cotton tape until conservation work can be carried out.
- Pendant seals are stored in purpose-built mill-board boxes with interior padding (if necessary removing them from their original tin boxes); boxed seals must then be held securely inside the box or other containers in which the document is kept, to avoid movement.
- Newspaper cuttings are photocopied onto acid-free paper or otherwise stored in inert material.

Photographic prints and negatives should be stored in individual silver-safe envelopes vertically inside a box or drawer, supported at intervals by stiff dividers.

Slides should be stored in standard boxes with close-fitting lids.

The following items will be removed :- acidic paper; plastic or PVC used as envelopes; folders or wrappers; rubber bands; coloured tape; glue and glued flaps; sellotape (this must be removed by, or under the supervision of, professionally trained staff); metal paper clips, staples and drawing pins

4. Training and user awareness

The success of the archive's preservation policy depends upon staff knowing what is expected of them and why, and upon their goodwill, willingness and co-operation.

Staff training and awareness-raising initiatives are essential:

- All staff are aware that the archive has a preservation policy.
- Staff are aware of their own preservation responsibilities.
- Sessions on preservation form part of staff induction and training programmes.

Users also have an important part to play in preserving the archives, and must be made aware of the need for care when handling them.

Document users must be aware that:

- Documents should be handled carefully at all times.
- The book rests provided should be used correctly.
- The written guidelines (search room rules) are to be followed when consulting original material.

5. Use of archives

Whilst access is promoted and facilitated, the care and safety of the document must be of paramount concern.

In the interests of the preservation of documents access to the following categories of material will be restricted:

- Fragile documents or those in such condition that consultation would cause further damage.
- Any original document for which a copy exists (unless the user can provide a valid reason for seeing the original)
- Any items and collections which are in the process of being arranged or listed
- Any items and collections which require specific preservation or conservation treatments.

Staff and users must be made aware of good handling instructions:

- Speed of document production must allow staff enough time to retrieve documents without having to compromise the safety of the document and allow more time for producing items such as large maps which are more delicate and difficult to handle safely.
- Trolleys are provided so that staff do not have to carry heavy or awkward loads.
- Staff are aware of their responsibilities to alert appropriate individuals where the threat of damage or loss is thought to exist, so that appropriate action can be initiated.

Staff are aware if the following handling precautions:-

Boxed materials:

- Remove boxes slowly and carefully from shelves as they may be unexpectedly heavy
- Remove any box(es) on top of the one required, rather than attempt to pull it out with the box(es) on top.
- Make more than one journey rather than try to carry more boxes than can be handled comfortably and safely. Alternatively, use a trolley, stacking the boxes carefully and safely, without overloading it.
- Take care not to damage any loose materials inside boxes by jarring them.
- Place boxes down carefully on flat surfaces.
- Remove required items from boxes carefully, lifting out any other items on top of them, rather than trying to pull them out with the others on top
- Do not tie too many documents together or tie them too tightly before boxing
- Do not overfill boxes or try to squeeze in documents that are too big
- Do not retie documents too tightly when re-boxing them

Maps and plans:

- Never roll maps and plans too tightly or too loosely
- Larger maps and plans should be rolled with a person at each end to keep them square
- Larger maps and plans should be carefully removed from storage and carried into the search room by at least two people
- Remove any maps or plans on top of the one required, rather than attempt to pull it out with the others on top

- Unroll maps and plans on flat surfaces large enough to contain and support them
- Use small weights to control maps and plans as they are being unrolled and to keep them flat
- Bound volumes:
 - Avoid pulling bound volumes off shelves by the tops of their spines: ease the volume out by pushing those to either side apart, and carefully grip the book either side of the spine
 - Make more than one journey rather than try to carry more bound volumes than can be handled comfortably and safely. Alternatively, use a trolley stacking the volumes carefully and safely, without overloading it
 - Bound volumes should not be forced back onto shelves: ease open a space between neighbouring volumes before carefully sliding the volume onto the shelf

Parchment documents:

- Parchment must always be slowly and carefully unrolled or unfolded as any tear can easily be made worse
- Parchment readily absorbs moisture, and reacts readily to environmental changes, if it becomes too dry or too damp it will cockle and split. It must therefore be returned to controlled storage conditions immediately after use

Seals:

- Both seal and document should always be supported during handling
- Broken seals should not be handled. Any seals found broken should be reported as needing conservation.

- Seals should only be removed from their boxes for inspection in exceptional circumstances and must then be handled with the greatest care and respect for their fragility

Members of the public should be made aware of their responsibilities:

- Documents should be handled as little as possible, with clean, dry hands, and avoiding the text, taking extra care with delicate items such as documents with seals
- Only soft lead pencils are to be used for note-taking
- Notepads or note paper should not be rested on documents
- A professional member of staff should be asked before tracing any documents, maps and plans, and a sheet of insert polyester should be used to protect the document if permission is granted.
- Documents should not be folded
- Bound volumes should not be forced open
- Book rests, cotton gloves or other protective equipment provided should be used
- Loose documents should be kept in the same order in which they were issued
- Damaged items should be reported to a member of staff

6. Conservation

Conservation resources and expertise are managed and targeted to meet established priorities by:

- Comprehensive collection surveys
- Sample collection surveys
- Records of use, highlighting most frequently requested items
- Spot checks as items are fetched from and returned to storage

Professional staff are aware of preservation priorities based on considerations of:- organisational, local, regional and national significance; rarity; value; level of use; condition/fragility of the item. A report on any document in need of conservation is required. Priority for ensuring the work is done is decided by the County Archivist. Conservation services cannot be provided in-house but procedures such as flattening documents, removing metal clips etc. are carried out by Denbighshire Record Office with appropriate guidance. Conservation priorities are decided by the Denbighshire County Archivist and methods of repair in discussion with the conservator selected.

7. Housekeeping

Good cleaning procedures are essential to ensure that the accumulation of dust and airborne pollutants which cause damage, biological infestation and accelerate acid-deterioration in paper is kept under control. These include:

- a routine cleaning programme for the archive's strong rooms
- a cleaning programme for document collections (during the annual closure week)
- safe storage of cleaning agents away from the document

8. Preservation copying

Preservation copying will often be necessary to protect fragile or damaged documents from further handling, or to preserve the information content of badly damaged documents which are unlikely to survive. The Denbighshire Record Office microfilms all parish registers, prohibiting use of originals. The master film will only be used in the event of the loss of a publicly available copy.

Photocopying for preservation purposes is done on archival quality paper.

Copies, whether microform or paper are given separate references from the

originals and catalogues marked where a surrogate copy is to be used instead of an original.

General photocopying for members of the public is subject to the following constraints:

- Photocopying machines are regularly and properly serviced under the terms of a service agreement with the suppliers.
- Due care is taken by staff copying documents
- Copies requested by the public are marked accordingly with the Record Office's notice concerning restrictions on further copying

Photocopying inevitably places serious physical strain on already fragile archive materials. The Record Office operates a clearly-defined policy on photocopying which allows photocopies to be made only if this can be done without risk of damage to the original and only for research purposes without the permission of the copyright owner. The following material will not be copied: - fragile items; rare items; bound manuscripts; valuable items; large and oversized items; documents with hanging seals; documents protected by copyright for purposes other than personal research without the permission of the copyright owner. Staff know how to handle documents as safely as possible when photocopying.

9. Disaster planning

Disaster management can help to prevent disasters occurring, and enable the archive to respond more efficiently and effectively to any disasters which do occur. A disaster plan should be available and updated accordingly. All staff are aware of disaster management procedures, and have copies of the plan which are kept at home.

The likelihood of a disaster affecting the Record Office is lessened by a fire detection and suppression system, installed by specialists and tested regularly.

Fire extinguishers and other emergency equipment are kept to hand and comply with the authority's health and safety standards.

10. Security

A well-maintained archive with visible signs of good security practices and alert, security conscious staff will discourage theft and vandalism and other criminal activity. Only identified persons are allowed access to the documents:

- County Archives Research Network readers' tickets are supplied, according to the network's procedures and, when supplied, are checked on each entry into the search room
- Contractors working in the building are registered on arrival and wear visitors' passes
- Only authorized staff are allowed access to storage area
- Staff are aware of their security roles and are encouraged to be vigilant and security conscious at all times, and to report anything suspicious immediately to the County Archivist or archivist-on-duty. In addition:
- The search room is supervised at all times
- Bags (including handbags), briefcases or coats are to be left in the secure lockers provided for their safe keeping, keys are collected from the reception on arrival
- Smoking, eating (including sweets), use of mobile phones, or drinking in the search room is not allowed
- Searchers sign a search register/visitors' signing-in form on arrival at reception, this is for fire purposes, and also for statistical purposes
- Users' signatures are checked against their CARN readers' tickets
- Document request slips provided on all tables must be completed before being allowed to consult original documents
- A separate document request slip is completed for each item requested

- Documents are to be returned to a member of staff who checks that they are complete, as issued
- Documents are returned to storage as soon as possible after use
- Users are limited to an easily managed number of documents at a time (at the discretion of the archivist-on-duty)
- Users are not allowed to take documents out of the search room
- Staff must be satisfied that users are visible from the invigilation point
- The search room rules are prominently displayed in reception and elsewhere
- Colour CCTV cameras monitor areas where it is difficult for staff to oversee, and records are kept for up to 10 days in case they are needed for evidence in prosecutions.
- Risk Assessments – including fire, flood, theft and vandalism to documents, buildings, contents and facilities are undertaken and appropriately acted upon to reduce or eliminate any risks identified
- Doors, windows and other potential access points are suitably and adequately alarmed against intruders including the storage and exhibition areas
- Suitable and adequate automatic fire suppression and detection systems are installed
- There is a no-smoking policy for staff and public

11. Exhibitions

Exhibiting or displaying original archive materials places them at considerable risk. Light can cause inks, colours and photographic images to fade; using the wrong display techniques or materials can damage or destroy a document; items may be stolen or vandalized

Due to these factors it is Denbighshire Record Office's policy only to allow original sources out of the record office in exceptional circumstances and to venues where the following criteria can be satisfied:

- No direct sunlight falling onto exhibits
- Appropriate lighting levels while the exhibition is open to visitors no artificial lighting when closed
- No items near windows, radiators, water pipes or any other fire or security hazards
- Acid-free cards or boards to be used for mounting
- No sellotape, drawing pins or metal staples to fix exhibits to display screens or cases
- Narrow strips of inert polyester to hold single pages or photographs in place, and to hold open the pages of a bound volume
- Old bound volumes to be supported appropriately and any vertically mounted or hung items similarly supported to reduce strain on the exhibit. Framed exhibits must be checked regularly to ensure that cords are not becoming frayed or detached
- Visitors to be prevented from being able to touch original items
- Exhibits to be only on short term display (up to a month) and checked regularly

Any person(s) or organization(s) wishing to borrow documents for public display are able to satisfy the above requirements and conditions. Items are only to be loaned in the event that they can satisfy them. A contractual agreement is made with any person(s) or organization(s) borrowing documents regarding the safety and security of the documents. This includes insurance cover while the documents are being transported and on display.

12. Finding aids

Finding aids based on archival descriptions allow the archive to establish administrative and/or intellectual control over its holdings. Public access is not permitted to documents until they have been properly listed. Good finding aids

can reduce unnecessary handling, and act as in inventory for security and insurance purposes.

Finding aids made available for public access should:

- Provide sufficient information to enable users to identify documents which are relevant to their search without the need to request – and thus unnecessarily handle – other documents which do not contain the information they require
- Inform users if records are unavailable for consultation because of their fragility or because they are being conserved