

Collections development and information policy

1. Policy statement

The archive service is committed to developing our collections in accordance with best practice while also supporting Explore's mission to enhance lives in York and to reflect our communities. For the archives service this includes communities both within the city and further afield.

We recognise that maintaining accurate and appropriate information about the records in our care is essential to promoting efficient collections management, improving public access, and increasing awareness of our unique collections.

2. Policy context

The following legislation provides the regulatory framework for this policy:

- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972 (s.224)
- Public Records Acts 1958 & 1967
- Law of Property Act 1924
- Manorial Documents Rules 1959
- Environmental Information Regulations (2004)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000 (hereafter FOIA)
- General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (hereafter GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (hereafter DPA). UK GDPR 2021 and the DPA together form data protection law in the UK

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following internal policies:

- Explore Archives Restricted Records Policy
- Explore Archives Collections Care and Preservation Policy
- Explore Archives Access Policy
- Explore Archives Special Collections Policy
- City of York Council (CYC) Records Retention Schedule

International and national cataloguing standards provide the framework for our cataloguing activities (see section 7.4 below).

This policy supports the key organisational priorities outlined in the Explore York Libraries and Archives Strategic Action Plan 2024-2027:

- Getting the Basics Right
- Engaging our Communities
- Building the Future

3. Key terms

Born-digital records: those records that have been created, in the first instance, in a digital format (e.g. a Word document).

Digitised records: those records where digital copies (also known as digital surrogates) have been made of physical records.

4. Purpose and scope

This policy applies to all the archive collections we currently hold as well as potential deposits. It covers all formats including physical, born-digital, and digitised records.

The purpose of this policy is to outline how we collect records and how we make information about those records available. It provides clear guidelines for staff, users, and depositors, ensuring consistent and transparent practice in managing our collections.

5. Introduction

This policy is divided into two main sections:

Collections Development

This section sets out how we acquire and appraise archives for preservation and public access, as well as procedures for the review of our existing collections to determine whether we should continue to hold them.

Collections Information

This section defines the information we will gather and create about our collections, through the processes of acquisition, accession, appraisal and cataloguing, and how we make this information available.

6. Collections development

6.1 Collecting Scope

Explore aims to collect archives that relate directly to communities, organisations or individuals within the current administrative boundaries of CYC or former parts of the historic County Borough of York, including the Ainsty.

Our principle collecting areas are:

- Records that document the decision-making processes and the most significant activities of the council and its predecessors
- Local public records, including court records, coroner's records, and prison records
- The records of individuals, families, communities and organisations in both public and private sectors who have made a significant contribution to the city

Our aim is for the collections to represent, as far as possible, the diverse lives, communities and activities of the city. We are proactive in reviewing our collections, identifying gaps, and engaging new depositors, particularly through our Arts Council funded activities as a National Portfolio Organisation.

We collect material in any format or media, either physical or digital, with the following exceptions:

- Offers of analogue films will normally be directed to an appropriate specialist film archive
- Offers of cultural heritage objects or works of art will normally be directed to an appropriate museum or gallery
- Offers of born-digital records preserved at another repository will not be accepted
- Offers of digital copies of physical material held at another repository will not be accepted

We collect digitised copies of physical records only where appropriate (for example, as preservation scans of fragile hard-copy documents).

Unpublished research notes of individuals will be collected only in exceptional circumstances, where the structure, content, and accessibility of the papers warrants permanent preservation.

6.2 Collecting strategy

The archive service analyses its collections thematically to understand what we hold, as well as collection trends. We review this analysis every three years. The service also contributes to The National Archives' annual accessions survey, which supports the monitoring of national collecting trends.

Current thematic strengths in our collections:

- Civic urban development
- Poor Law out-relief
- Sporting archives
- Philanthropic organisations
- Music collections of local organisations

Current thematic weaknesses in our collections:

- Local businesses
- Disability groups
- Ethnic minority groups
- Oral history sources

Explore is proactive in developing contacts and building relationships with records creators and custodians, allowing us to take practical steps to begin to address gaps in our collections, particularly through our engagement programme.

6.3 Other institutions

Explore recognises the collecting strengths of other professionally staffed archive repositories, both local and national, and will endeavour to avoid competition or duplication of effort. When acquiring archives, Explore will bear in mind the appropriateness of the service as a place for deposit, and will not acquire archives that clearly fall within the known collecting remit of another organisation, without consultation with that organisation.

6.4 Acquisition

Explore acquires archives in the following ways:

- By gift (including bequest)
- By purchase
- By transfer from CYC
- By transfer from a Public Records body

In exceptional circumstances archives may be deposited on loan. All deposits will be for fixed renewable loan periods. We do not accept items on permanent loan.

All terms and conditions of deposits are set out in our agreements with donors at the time of deposit. Our standard terms and conditions are outlined at the end of our Gift Agreement.

We report new acquisitions to CYC officers and to our Board through our internal reporting mechanisms and we complete The National Archives' annual Accessions Survey.

6.5 Appraisal

Appraisal of collections supports our aim to hold records that reflect diverse aspects of life in York past and present, covering as many communities, individuals and organisations as possible.

We cannot automatically accept offers of new material and we cannot automatically accept every item within collections. All new offers will be subject to a selection process to appraise their long-term informational, historical, legal/evidential, social, and community value against the resource implications and costs of acquisition.

Offers of all new material will first be assessed against the general collecting criteria set out in Section 6 above. Professionally qualified staff will then also consider:

- The financial costs of storage, conservation and public access.
- The quality and quantity of information and evidence in the new material relative to the costs of custodianship.
- Whether the material requires specialist skills or equipment for its conservation, interpretation and public access which are beyond our resources to supply.
- Whether the material duplicates other material already in the collections.
- Whether the material adds value by filling a gap in the existing collections.
- Whether the material forms part of an existing collection held in another repository.
- The length of any closure periods that will have to be applied before the material can be opened for public access.
- The quality and robustness of the material's provenance and previous chain of custody (i.e. how well it can be authenticated).

Selection and appraisal decisions take place during our monthly collections meetings and are recorded in the minutes of these meetings. All records relating to appraisal will be retained permanently.

6.6 Review and disposal

We are currently carrying out a review of the material in our custody to ensure that it continues to conform to the collecting and appraisal criteria set out in this policy.

The service recognises and conforms to The National Archives' *Deaccessioning and disposal: Guidance for archive services*, 2015. Potential disposal decision-making will be undertaken using the disposal destination decision tree in this guidance.

Explore accepts there is a strong presumption against later disposal or deaccessioning of material that has been accessioned by the service. However, we recognise that the service holds a number of legacy collections that were not subject to current appraisal principles and processes. The service reserves the right to conduct a retrospective appraisal exercise, including consultation with relevant third parties, to determine whether these collections confirm to our collecting scope and strategy set out in Section 6.1 and 6.2 above.

Deaccessioning decisions are made by an archive professional, based on archival principles and professional good practice and are not be driven solely by forces external to the archive service. Deaccessioning is not considered in response to budgetary or storage constraints.

Any decision to deaccession material will be recorded and included in our reporting mechanisms to CYC and our Board of Directors.

In seeking to identify an alternative repository for a particular item or collection, the service endeavours to match current levels of public access, in the following priority:

- Transfer of title to another public cultural institution which will maintain free public access to the material.
- Transfer of title to another custodian (public or private) who can offer a realistic proposal for the long-term preservation of the material with free public access.
- Transfer of title to another custodian (public or private) who can offer a realistic proposal for the long-term preservation of the material but not necessarily with free public access.
- Offer back to the original donor or their successors in law.
- Offer for sale.
- Dispose by other means.

Where material in our custody no longer conforms to this collecting policy and is held by us as a 'permanent loan' we will contact the original depositor or their successors in law and work with them to seek an alternative future for the material in the following order of preference:

- With the depositor's agreement transfer the deposit to another public archive or local history service, or other public cultural institution, which will maintain free public access to the material.
- With the depositor's agreement transfer the deposit to another custodian (public or private) who can offer a realistic proposal for the long-term preservation of the material with free public access.
- With the depositor's agreement transfer the deposit to another custodian (public or private) who can offer a realistic proposal for the long-term preservation of the material but not necessarily with free public access.
- Terminate the deposit agreement and return the material to the original depositor.

No archival records will be acquired or disposed of in contravention of the terms of any current legislation, and in particular the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967 and the Manorial Documents Rules 1959.

All records relating to disposal will be retained permanently.

6.7 Withdrawals

Depositors can withdraw physical records temporarily for an agreed period if required, for example for use in an external exhibition. We require advance notice for this arrangement, and permission in writing from the depositor.

Physical records on loan can be withdrawn permanently. If depositors reclaim their records permanently, we reserve the right to recover the cost of transport, storage, cataloguing and any conservation work undertaken, and to make a copy of the records.

Owing to the complexity of digital preservation processes it may not be possible to return records to depositors under any circumstances. It will be possible to delete digital records from our systems.

7. Collections information

Explore accepts that the archive inherited significant legacy issues in relation to the quality of its collections information. In 2024 the team established the **Setting the Record Straight Project**, an ongoing programme of review and remediation that aims to tackle these legacy issues and ensure we collect and provide consistently high-quality collections information that aligns with sector best practice. It is expected that this programme of work will be carried out over many years.

7.1 Acquisitions

Explore will only acquire records which fall within our collecting scope as defined in Section 6.1 of this policy.

It is essential to confirm the provenance and legal title of material being offered to us. We will record details about the depositor, the location from which the material was transferred, any intermediary involved in the transfer, the date of transfer and the terms of deposit. This information is only available to staff.

We permanently retain signed hard copy gift agreements, recording the date of transfer, the terms of deposit, brief details of the records, covering dates, copyright information, and permission to appraise. Any associated correspondence is also retained permanently. A signed agreement is offered to our depositors at the point of deposit. We keep digital copies of all agreements and associated records.

Our agreements ask depositors to inform us of any changes in contact details.

We will contact depositors to inform them when cataloguing work is complete.

7.2 Transfers from CYC and local Public Records bodies

Under the terms of the Local Government Act 1972, CYC has obligations to transfer records identified for permanent preservation to the City Archive, held at Explore.

The records created by CYC and its departments that require permanent preservation are listed in the council's published Records Retention Schedule. CYC officers are responsible for transferring records to Explore in a timely manner and Explore supports this work with professional guidance on selection, listing, accessibility and packaging.

Explore is a designated Place of Deposit (PoD) for local public records under the Public Records Act 1958 (as amended 1967). All public records which are transferred must be appropriately packaged and listed so that they can be taken into storage by the archive service without delay. Both packaging and transfer are the responsibility of the creating authority as stated in the Act. The Head of Archives keeps in regular contact with public records bodies to facilitate this process.

7.3 Accessioning

Recording accurate and appropriate information about the provenance of the archives in our care is important for maintaining the integrity of the collections and answering enquiries.

Each collection is given a unique accession number at the time of receipt and this is used to manage the records until they are catalogued. This number is also used on the agreement and receipt relating to the records.

Information about each accession is recorded in our online accessions register and in hard copy. Details about the source of the accession and contact information for the depositor is also recorded. This information is confidential and is not available to the public.

7.4 Cataloguing

Cataloguing our collections is vital for the management of the information within our collections and as the main way to provide public access. Cataloguing priorities are assessed each year and included our annual Cataloguing Plan. We use the following criteria for identifying priorities and those collections suitable for external funding bids:

- User demand
- Explore's strategic priorities
- Condition of the collection
- Significance of collection
- Size of collection
- The quality of information currently available on the collection

We are committed to cataloguing in accordance with the following international standards and best practice:

- International Standards for Archival Description (General) – ISAD(G) 2nd edition 2000
- International Standard for Bibliographic Description – ISBD 2011
- Dublin Core metadata element set – ISO 15836-1: 2017
- International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families – ISAAR (CPF) 2nd edition, 2004
- Rules for the Construction of Place Names – NCA Rules 1997
- The UK Archival Thesaurus – UKAT 2004

Our catalogues are made available via our web-based cataloguing system, which also allows for the generation of a pdf print version of individual catalogues.

We recognise that, in common with other archives services, we have a backlog of unlisted archives, and that this is a major barrier to public access. Reducing this backlog forms part of our annual cataloguing plan. New accessions are catalogued within 18 months of deposit to avoid adding to the backlog.

We provide information about newly acquired collections and accruals as part of The National Archives' annual accessions survey.

On behalf of CYC, Explore retains the copyright in all cataloguing and collections information created by the archive service.

7.5 Access points

We recognise that our users benefit when different methods of discovery are available on our catalogue. We are currently engaged in a long-term project to add place, subject and name access points to all our higher-level collection descriptions.

7.6 Describing collections

Our aim is to ensure that cataloguing provides our audiences with information that is accurate, insightful, relevant and accessible. Wherever possible, we work with depositors to ensure the catalogue information accurately represents their collections. We respond to all feedback on our catalogue and amend information whenever it is possible, and appropriate to do so.

7.7 Loans

Explore is open to loaning items on a temporary basis to other archives or heritage organisations if they can meet the conditions set out in our loan agreement.

7.8 Appraisal and disposal

Appraisal is the process of distinguishing records of continuing value from those of no further value, so that the latter may be disposed of. More information about the process involved in appraisal and the criteria we use can be found in Section 6.5 above.

We record information on appraisal and disposal decisions at the highest level of the catalogue for each collection.

8. Roles and responsibilities

The Head of Archives has overall responsibility and oversight of this policy. The archives team at Explore have responsibility for implementing this policy. The council's Information Governance team supports this policy through their records management activities.

If you would like to provide feedback on this policy, please contact archives@exploreymork.org.uk

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