

# Collections care and preservation policy

## 1. Policy statement

Explore acknowledges that as custodians of the City Archive, we have a responsibility to ensure that the records in our care can be accessed, used, and enjoyed now and in the future. We aim to implement the best practicable standards of collections care and preservation, with an emphasis on preventative care of both our physical and digital collections.

Our collections care activities directly support our strategic priorities and key organisational activities, including:

- Engaging people with the culture and heritage of our City
- Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create and share ideas
- Custodianship of the City Archive
- Supporting individual and community wellbeing

## 2. Policy context

The following standards for collections care and digital preservation provide the framework for this policy:

- BS 4971:2017, Conservation and care of archive and library collections
- PD5454: 2012 Guide for the storage and exhibition of archive materials (previous standard, now withdrawn)
- BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of cultural heritage
- Open Archival Information System (OAIS) reference model (ISO 14721:2012)
- PREMIS (Preservation Metadata Implementation Strategies)

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

- Explore Archives Collections Development and Information Policy
- Explore Archives Access Policy
- Explore Archives Special Collections Policy

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

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

## 3. Key terms

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

**Digitised records/digital surrogates:** digital copies of physical records

**Metadata:** information about other data, such as catalogue descriptions of archive material

**Preservation of material:** covers activities that focus on preventing damage and deterioration of collections, such as:

- Managerial and financial considerations such as storage and accommodation, staffing levels and policies
- Physical storage facilities and environment
- Digital storage capabilities
- Managerial and administrative procedures and decisions affecting how items are stored, and how and how often they are used
- Digital processes such as checking for format/software obsolescence and corruption/loss of data
- The creation of digital copies, to preserve the original physical record

**Conservation of material:** covers active physical treatment of archives that are already deteriorated or damaged, such as:

- Cleaning records
- Repairing tears and other damage
- Rebinding volumes
- Treating the physical carriers of digital records

## 4. Scope and purpose

This policy covers all the collections that are held by Explore for permanent preservation on behalf of the City of York Council (CYC). This includes physical records and printed material, born-digital records, digitised records, and related metadata that have been formally deposited or transferred to the archives service in accordance with our Collections Development and Information Policy. It also includes any access or preservation copies, and related metadata, created as part of our digital preservation activities.

Not included in the scope of this policy are:

- the organisational records of Explore that are still needed for business purposes
- CYC records retained by the council and still required for business purposes

This policy provides clear guidance to staff, users, and depositors on how we look after our collections, ensuring access for current and future generations.

## 5. Introduction

Our collections care programme is designed to mitigate the risks and threats to the long-term survival and accessibility of our archives. Preventative preservation underpins every activity that takes place and is incorporated into the everyday work of the archives service.

## 6. Our holdings

The format of records in our collections are varied and include (but are not limited to):

- Manuscript on parchment
- Manuscript on paper
- Typescript or photocopied on paper
- Printing on paper
- One-layer photographic materials (e.g. Daguerreotype)

- Two-layer photographic materials (e.g. wet collodion glass plate negatives, gelatin dry glass plate negatives)
- Three-layer photographic materials (e.g. collodion printing papers)
- Analogue material, such as audio cassettes and VHS
- Digital records on media carriers, such as CDs and floppy disks
- Digital records stored in a digital environment, e.g. Word Documents, Excel spreadsheets stored on our cloud-based digital preservation system
- Seals of other materials including lac/shellac, lead, gutta-percha

## 7. Threats to the collections

Our holdings are at risk from a range of threats that must be mitigated or actively removed.

To help manage this risk, we carry out a formal Collections Risk Assessment, which is reviewed annually, or as significant change occurs. We receive support and advice from professionally qualified conservators via our subscription to the National Conservation Service (NCS).

Like many archive services, our collections include records that have been historically affected by mould. The service has developed clear guidelines on identifying mould, and the conditions under which it is possible to treat and provide access to this material.

## 8. Preservation of physical records

### 8.1 Standards

We seek to comply with relevant standards and will seek professional advice on implementing new standards as they emerge. In particular, we will ensure that all preservation and conservation work adheres to BS 4971:2017, and that all remedial conservation work is carried out by qualified conservators. Staff at NCS provide advice on relevant conservation standards and their application.

### 8.2 Storage of archive collections

Our archives are held in accommodation that conforms to PD5454:2012, which was the appropriate standard when our storage area was built. We are currently working to meet the new standard BS EN 16893:2018.

Approximately one third of the collection is held in our on-site store at York Explore Library and Archive, Museum Street, York, YO1 7DS, which provides an environmentally controlled and secure environment. Archives are stored in low-acid boxes and/or preservation packaging, on mobile and static steel shelving, or in map drawers. Inclusion of the store and plantroom in our ongoing maintenance schedule is compulsory. Regular servicing and testing of the fire detection system and intruder alarm system is also a compulsory element of our buildings maintenance programme.

Two-thirds of the collection is stored offsite with the commercial records storage and management company Deepstore. Deepstore have stated their facilities conform to the highest level of BS EN 16893:2018 and BS 4971:2017.

### 8.3 Fire prevention and safety

Our on-site store is fitted with four-hour fire doors and is constructed to be fire-resistant on all sides. It is fitted with an aspirant fire detection system. Smoke detectors are located

throughout the York Explore building. The alarm system is monitored by the North Yorkshire Fire Brigade, who respond to any unplanned activation.

Automatic fire suppression is not installed but fire extinguishers are present throughout the archives store and building. In the event of a fire, an automated system of dampers stops air flow in the trunking of the air conditioning system.

#### 8.4 Security of collections

We are committed to ensuring appropriate levels of security to reduce the risk of vandalism, theft and terrorism. We have an anti-terrorism policy and relevant procedures, which we will apply in the event of an attack.

CCTV cameras are fitted at strategic locations in our building. The cameras feed through to the CYC security team Control Centre, which is located on council premises at West Offices.

An intruder alarm is set outside of opening hours. In the event of an activation an external agency responds automatically to the call. All doors are fitted with appropriate locks.

Access to archive storage areas is restricted to archives staff and operated by electronic security fobs.

Access to the Archives Reading Room is also restricted and operated by electronic security fobs. We provide lockers for visitors to secure their personal possessions, and to ensure that large items and bags are not brought into the Reading Room. The Archives Reading Room is supervised by a member of the archives team whenever archives are in use.

#### 8.5 Environmental monitoring and controls

The environmental conditions within all storage areas and in the Archives Reading Room are monitored. Digital loggers are used to monitor the temperature and relative humidity within the store and the Reading Room. Data for our store is collected twice daily by support staff and monitored by archivists. We also use loggers to monitor conditions within our boxes. Data from these loggers is forwarded to NCS every three months, who upload the information to our member records. All staff are trained to report any abnormalities to the Duty Archivist to ensure immediate investigation, response, and escalation if necessary.

The environment in our on-site store is controlled by a bespoke HVAC system. It provides temperature and relative humidity controls in line with PD5454:2012.

#### 8.6 Environmental sustainability

We are committed to continually improving our environmental performance via reductions in our energy use and our carbon emissions. For this reason, we will look to find the best balance between passive and active environmental control solutions. We will monitor, review and improve our environmental management systems in line with current best practice and with the support of professional conservation advice.

Improvement actions in this area are incorporated into our Archives Forward Plan.

#### 8.7 Storage enclosures

To protect new accessions from dust, and damage from accidental water ingress, we use industry standard conservation products: high quality acid-free paper and board, polyester sleeves, unbleached tape and brass paperclips that meet the technical specifications

recommended for archival use. We are also carrying out a programme of re-boxing and of repackaging earlier accessions which were not prepared to current standards.

Holdings are housed in low acid boxes. Where this is not possible, for example due to the size of an item, a Tyvek® cover is used instead. Documents are labelled and packed in a manner that reduces the need for handling. Photographs are stored in polyester or Silver-safe® enclosures, rolled items will be protected with Tyvek®. Bespoke boxes are ordered for outsize items where necessary.

### 8.8 Housekeeping

Staff are trained to clean storage areas in a way that is not detrimental to the collections. Archives staff have sole responsibility for cleaning our secure onsite storage areas. Chemical-based products are not used for cleaning areas where documents are consulted.

Documents themselves will only be cleaned by or under the supervision of an archivist/conservator, or following specific training by an archivist/conservator. We have a rolling volunteer programme that supports the work of surface cleaning, repackaging, labelling, and basic remedial tasks such as surface cleaning.

We have an Integrated Pest Management System to prevent, monitor and control the risk of insect damage. The physical condition of all new accessions will be assessed in a secure workspace before being allowed into the storage area. Particular care is taken to ensure that the introduction of pests is prevented. Contaminated archive material, which has the potential to harm or infect other collections, will be placed in isolation and assessed with the help of trained conservators from NCS.

Archives staff are trained to recognise the symptoms of presence of mould or pests. If they are discovered in the collection, affected items will be quarantined and a conservator contacted immediately for advice. Items will remain quarantined until the risk of contagion has passed. If this is not possible, the affected records may be sent to an external conservator or company for treatment, or be removed from the collection and disposed of in accordance with the Terms of Deposit.

### 8.9 Handling

Staff and volunteers are trained in handling archives and promoting best practice, and volunteers always work under the supervision of a trained member of staff. We provide researchers with guidance on handling and appropriate aids, such as book cushions and rests, and a variety of weights to protect books and archives.

Fragile items are identified and withheld from public access, and conservation treatments are scheduled as resources permit.

### 8.10 Digital surrogates

Staff are trained to use our digital BookEye scanner to make safe copies of physical items up to A2. The equipment is serviced and maintained by the provider. Large format items are sent to other archives services for digitising where necessary.

For collections and material that is heavily used and / or in poor condition, surrogate copies are made available in a format that has longevity and is easily accessible.

Preservation copies of digital surrogates are stored in Preservica, our third-party digital preservation solution.

### 8.11 Remedial conservation

As Explore does not have an in-house conservation studio, remedial conservation works takes place at the NCS studios by qualified conservators.

Fragile and unstable documents are identified by members of staff and recorded on our catalogue. If these items have previously been available on public access, they will be withdrawn to prevent further damage until they can be stabilised or repaired.

With advice from NCS, we identify conservation priorities each year based on the following criteria:

- Cost of treatment
- User demand
- Physical condition

When documents are repaired we ask that as much of the original document is retained as possible, whilst ensuring the long-term stability and accessibility of the item.

### 8.12 Documentation

For all remedial conservation projects, we will ask that the condition before and after treatment is documented, along with all conservation work. This information is retained permanently.

## 9. Digital preservation

### 9.1 Introduction

Explore recognises the vulnerability of born digital records, digital surrogates and analogue media in our care.

As with paper material, we recognise that robust processes are needed to ensure the authenticity, reliability and long-term accessibility of born-digital material.

### 9.2 Standards

Explore will adhere to standards and emerging good practice for all stages in the digital curation lifecycle including the collection, storage, management, preservation and dissemination of digital content.

We will manage collections to conform with:

- the Open Archival Information System Model (OAIS) (ISO 14721:2003)
- the PREMIS Data Dictionary for Preservation Metadata maintained by the Library of Congress.

### 9.3 Content and file formats

We are able to preserve a wide range of born-digital content that includes, but is not limited to:

- Text documents (plain and marked up)
- Still and moving image collections
- Datasets (data designed for use in spreadsheets, database and statistical packages)
- Digital audio recordings
- Websites\*

With regard to live and dynamic websites for ongoing organisations, Explore's position is to encourage institutions to self-refer their sites to the UK Web Archive.

We are working to develop processes to preserve emails and social media content.

We do not expect to preserve:

- Software
- Hardware, except for its forensic workstation capabilities

#### 9.4 Organisational viability

We are committed to automating digital preservation processes wherever possible to ensure staff have capacity to carry out digital preservation efficiently and effectively. We have access to a cloud-based digital preservation solution, Preservica, which helps us to achieve this. Two of our permanent archivists will be trained in digital preservation to ensure skills are not concentrated in one role.

#### 9.5 Documentation

We will obtain explicit agreements from depositors about our rights to engage in digital preservation actions and the levels of access we can provide to digital records. These permissions will include the right to migrate files to different formats and produce copies for preservation and access. We will not accept digital collections without donors signing a gift/loan agreement that permits these actions.

Preservica logs all digital preservation actions, ensuring that we maintain a retrievable audit trail.

#### 9.6 IT Capability

In partnership with CYC, and Explore's IT provider, Explore will maintain the technical infrastructure and storage capacity required to carry out the transfer, ingest, and preservation of digital records.

#### 9.7 Acquisition, transfer and ingest

Potential deposits of digital records will be assessed with reference to our Collections Development and Information Policy. Pre-ingest workflows will be implemented and documented to ensure the integrity and validity of records is maintained at all times prior to ingest into Preservica.

#### 9.8 Digital preservation processes

Explore is committed to ensuring that long-term access to digital records is maintained through the pro-active implementation of digital preservation processes. Members of the archives team have administrator access to CYC's digital preservation solution, Preservica. This system provides sophisticated automation of many digital preservation processes including migration, validity checks, and the creation of access copies. Preservica ensures that our digital preservation activities are automated wherever possible and provides a secure trusted environment for the storage of our digital records.

Explore will develop and maintain workflows, processes and procedures to guide and support the acquisition and preservation of digital content. These activities will be documented and available to all staff in our Cataloguing Manual and our Procedural Manual.

## 9.9 Sustainability

The ease with which digital records are created pose particular challenges for service and environmental sustainability. The following will mitigate against these risks:

- Explore recognises that as with paper records only a small portion of digital records will be selected for permanent preservation.
- We will preserve digital surrogates of hard-copy material only where warranted for access and conservation reasons.
- We will only accept transfers from CYC services that can cite a Records Retention Schedule trigger or alternative justification for transfer to the archive
- We will provide clear guidance for external depositors to ensure we do not receive unnecessary copies of documents.

## 10. Emergency planning

We maintain a Disaster Prevention and Recovery Plan. The plan outlines a framework for the mitigation of risk and guidelines for disaster preparedness. It also details procedures and actions in the event of an emergency, enabling staff to act swiftly to minimise damage to the building and holdings.

The plan is reviewed annually and updated when necessary. All relevant members of staff are given a hard copy of the disaster plan, and a digital copy is filed on the network server. Practical training for senior staff in responding to disaster situations is provided by NCS every three years. Relevant elements of that training are then cascaded to staff at York Explore. Refresher sessions for all staff are delivered annually.

## 11. Disaster response and salvage equipment

Explore subscribes to Harwell Drying Restoration Priority Use Plus Service, which provides recovery and emergency salvage services in the event of a disaster.

The archive service maintains a supply of disaster kit for emergency use by staff.

## 12. Collections care awareness

We are committed to promoting knowledge about best practice and the importance of collections care. We provide advice and guidance to CYC services, outside organisations and institutions, community groups, owners of private archives, sector colleagues, and the public. We also make information on caring for archives available on our website.

## 13. Continuous improvement

Explore is committed to assessing and benchmarking our digital and physical preservation capabilities at regular intervals to ensure continuous improvement. The following benchmarking tools will be used to highlight improvements and areas of development:

- For physical records we will use the National Conservation Service's Benchmarking Tool (to be completed every three years)
- For digital records we will use the Digital Preservation Coalition Rapid Maturity Model (DPC RAM) (to be completed every year until 2026 and thereafter every 3 years)

Areas for improvement identified through these benchmarking activities will be incorporated as actions into our Archives Forward Plan.

## 14. Roles and responsibilities

The Head of Archives has oversight and overall responsibility for this policy, with input from conservators at NCS. Archives staff are responsible for support and implementation.

If you would like to provide feedback on this policy, please contact

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Version control		
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1.1	30/08/2025	Minor wording and layout changes