

# Surrey History Centre: Collections Information Policy

## 1. Introduction and Background

Surrey History Centre cares for and makes publicly accessible the historic archive and local studies collections relating to the County of Surrey. The Centre was established in 1998 by Surrey County Council to hold and develop the collections formerly housed in Surrey Record Office, Kingston, Guildford Muniment Room and Surrey Local Studies Library. In 2006 it became part of Surrey Heritage.

The Centre is recognised as a place of deposit for public records relating to the County of Surrey and is appointed the diocesan record office for the diocese of Guildford and much of the diocese of Southwark.

Millions of documents dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are stored in our strongrooms. They are appraised, sorted, catalogued and indexed to facilitate access, given conservation treatment where necessary and stored in the optimum environment for their long term preservation.

The archival holdings are unique and irreplaceable, generally being the original and only record in existence and their value lies in their being retained in their original form as far as possible. They are primary source material and maintaining their integrity is vital to their legal evidential and historic value.

## 2. Purpose and Scope of this Policy

Maintaining accurate documentation of the collections of archival and local studies holdings is central to the purpose of Surrey History Centre. Good documentation of its collections, through accessioning and cataloguing, is fundamental to collection management and to the provision of public access.

This policy explains how Surrey History Centre seeks to ensure these fundamental requirements are met within the resources available to the service. It will assist in the planning and prioritisation of documentation work and the identification and allocation of resources.

This policy is one of several existing policies relating to different elements of the care and management of the collections in the keeping of Surrey History Centre. The aim of the policies collectively is to ensure that the collections are properly managed and preserved, and are made available in the most appropriate manner to ensure their long-term survival and usability.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the **Collections Management Policy** and **Collections Development Policy** which describe the statutory and legal basis for Surrey History Centre and set out its integrated approach to the management of its collections and the framework of standards and code of ethics within which it operates.

It should also be read with in conjunction with our Collections Information Plan which sets out our objectives in the enhancement of information about the collections within our care.

### 3. General

For the main activities relating to collections documentation work, that is accessioning and cataloguing, information is currently collected, stored and interrogated using CALM collections management software.

Surrey History Centre works towards meeting common international standards and principles governing the creation of catalogues for archives. It is committed to improving the quality of collections information in terms of current standards and to working with partners to adopt and employ agreed standards of documentation which ensure maximum interoperability and sharing of metadata.

This commitment is balanced against the need to facilitate access to archive collections by making available information written before the development of current standards, or information intended originally as a draft.

Professionally qualified archivists, committed to the Code of Conduct of the Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland, are responsible for the quality of the information provided by Surrey History Centre about its collections.

The archivists, through team meetings, regularly review operational work relating to maintaining and enhancing collections information. A procedural manual guides all staff in collections management and CALM procedures.

### 4. Accession Information

Recording the provenance of material held by Surrey History Centre is a crucial part of preserving the integrity of Surrey's archival heritage. Archivists will create an accession record for every archival record or records that enter the Centre. This record will include the unique identifier assigned to the records (which will subsequently be linked to the catalogue record), the name and contact details of the source, the terms of deposit (eg. donation, deposit, transfer, purchase or bequest), the size of the deposit (cubic metres), the date of deposit, and will give a preliminary indication of the scope, covering dates, and any restrictions on access or copying.

Surrey History Centre currently records and retains this accession information on its CALM database which contains a comprehensive record of accessions since 1992. Hard copy registers are also maintained and for the period before 1992 provide the fundamental record of accessions into the History Centre's predecessors, Surrey Record Office and Guildford Muniment Room. Accession register information is not made available to the public.

A formal receipt for every donation, deposit, transfer, purchase and bequest of records will be issued, requiring the dated counter signature of the donor or depositor by which they consent to the 'Terms of Deposit', printed on the reverse of the receipt (see Appendix). Any agreed variation in the standard terms of deposit will be recorded on the database and receipt.

Any known intellectual property rights will be recorded at point of accessioning; where no information is given staff will be guided by the terms of current copyright legislation.

Each accession record is assigned a priority rating as a measure of its significance and anticipated level of use in order to prioritise cataloguing activity. Accessions forming the historic uncatalogued backlog which are not recorded on the CALM database (chiefly uncatalogued accessions received before 1992) have been surveyed, categorised and prioritised and this information is recorded in an Excel spreadsheet.

Information as to names and contact information for depositors, donors etc is maintained in a linked CALM database. A card index contains information about some older depositors. Each depositor is given a number which is linked to a related deposit file, in which are filed the receipt and any correspondence and notes on appraisal and review decisions and access and publication requests from third parties.

Surrey History Centre acknowledges the importance of maintaining up to date information about, and good relationships with, donors and depositors. It encourages donors and depositors to keep the Centre informed of changes of ownership or contact information by inviting them to join the Centre's contact list.

Information about new accessions is shared with users in a number of ways: an annual accession report is sent to The National Archives and also published online; an annual review of significant accessions is published in the journal 'Surrey History'; and regular interim reports are provided to the local family history societies and other heritage organisations. A monthly digest of new accessions is emailed to all staff to ensure they are informed and up to date.

## 5. Catalogue Information

Catalogues, providing detailed and accurate information about collections to item level, are vital in promoting and providing public access to archive collections and in managing the collections to ensure their permanent preservation.

Surrey History Centre coordinates cataloguing through its service plan to achieve a strategic, managed and flexible approach to creating new and improved information about the collections in its care, including those created and preserved in digital format.

All new cataloguing conforms to current professional standards, namely the principles for multi-level archival description set out in the General International Standard of Archival Description (ISAD(G)). The requirements of Surrey History Centre's CALM database enforces these standards.

In general, the mandatory elements specified in ISAD(G), namely title (including creator), covering dates, and level of description, are employed in all current cataloguing work and efforts are ongoing to bring older catalogues created before the introduction of standards into greater conformity to those standards. Extent is used more selectively but is recorded for all accessions.

Surrey History Centre has historically relied on text retrieval rather than the creation of index terms to facilitate searching. However we have commenced the introduction of consistent index terms to collection level records with a view to submitting catalogue data to the Archives Hub

These will be created in accordance with the following standards:

The International Standard Archival Authority 'Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR(CPF))

The National Council on Archives 'Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names'.

The UK Archival Thesaurus (UKAT) for subject definitions.

Where appropriate interim box listing or volunteer cataloguing will be used to facilitate access to lower priority accessions. Volunteers are also used to add detail to the basic catalogue record where this is deemed valuable, particularly for such personal records as diaries and correspondence.

New catalogues are created directly in CALM or, if created using templates, will be uploaded into CALM shortly after creation. Newly created catalogues are published automatically on the internet through the History Centre's online catalogue Surrey Archives (<https://www.surreyarchives.org.uk/>). The catalogues are also published on the Exploring Surrey's Past website, where they can be searched alongside the holdings of other heritage bodies within Surrey and the Historic Environment Record. User comment on catalogues is encouraged and facilitated through the Exploring Surrey's Past website and where appropriate this is used to modify or enhance the catalogue.

Paper copies of each catalogue are available in the Centre's searchroom and paper or digital copies of a catalogue are sent to the donor or depositor and added to the deposit file.

A range of thematic and subject guides to our holdings have been published online, with links to the full online catalogues, and we will continue an active publication programme of such guides. We will also promote new cataloguing discoveries through social media.

In common with almost all record offices across the United Kingdom Surrey History Centre has a slowly growing accumulation of accessions which have not been catalogued and which, therefore, are not readily accessible to researchers. To remedy this situation, targeted cataloguing of backlog accessions by archivists and supervised volunteers has been introduced for smaller accessions; cataloguing of larger and more complex backlog accessions will be achieved through externally funded projects. Priority accessions for such projects have been identified.

## 6. Locations

Information as to the location within a strongroom of a catalogued item is recorded on the CALM catalogue record. A comprehensive Access database of all document locations, including uncatalogued accessions, is also maintained, which is linked to our document ordering system.

## 7. Deaccessioning and Withdrawals

Records, accessioned in the past, which are now considered to fall outside the scope of our Collection Development Policy, may be de-accessioned. In such instances, every effort will be made to contact the original depositor and to find an alternative home, if appropriate. Any such actions will be recorded on the CALM accessions database and the relevant deposit file.

Withdrawals by a depositor, either temporary or permanent, and temporary loans for exhibition purposes, are recorded on our document ordering system and on the relevant deposit file and the catalogue record amended.

#### 8. Protection of our Collections Information

Our CALM information systems and data are stored and accessed on a remotely-hosted system and are regularly backed up.

Hardcopy accession registers are stored in our strongrooms and microfilms of completed registers are stored offsite in Hampshire Record Office.

Other collections management information is stored at Surrey County Council's networked data centre and is therefore subject to the Council's overall data backup, security and disaster recovery routines.

#### 9. Date of Publication and Review

This policy was first published in March 2017. It was reviewed in September 2020.  
Next review: 2023