

Surrey History Centre: Archives And Local Studies Preservation 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 12th to the 21st 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 historical value.

2. Policy Statement and Scope

The Centre's preservation policy provides a framework for maintaining our collections in the best possible conditions to ensure their long term, generally permanent preservation. It sets out how the risk of damage from agents within the external environment (such as light, damp, fire, theft, pollutants and pests) and from agents within the fabric of the collections themselves (such as acid and chemical dyes) is minimised.

The scope of this policy is the physical preservation of archives and local studies collections in our care. It should be read alongside our other policies particularly those relating to Access, Collections Development, Collections Information and Disaster Prevention.

3. Definitions

Preservation is the retention and maintenance of material over time.

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

4. Principles

The following principles will underpin all actions undertaken for the preservation and conservation of the collections:

- Archives will be maintained in perpetuity
- All aspects of their original format, their historical, textual, pictorial and physical nature will be preserved wherever possible.
- The risks to collections will be assessed and measures put in place to control them.
- Where necessary, preventive conservation measures, based on scientifically-tested treatments, will be employed to protect and preserve records and arrest deterioration
- Remedial conservation treatments will be applied where there is an identified and prioritised need. No major treatment will be carried out without the owner's consent.
- Conservation treatments will only be carried out by appropriately qualified persons.
- All treatments will use sympathetic materials and will be restricted to the minimum necessary to stabilise an item or collection and make it fit for use or copying.
- No written evidence will be concealed or removed and no missing text filled in.
- Original bindings and other materials removed in the course of conservation will be retained.
- Any treatment will not be concealed and will be reversible so that the evidential integrity of the repaired document is not compromised.
- All treatments will be fully documented.
- Original material will be made accessible or a surrogate copy of the item provided in the case of high demand or badly damaged or fragile items. In the latter case, the original item will not be produced to the public and will be protected from further deterioration in the best possible conditions.

Conservation staff will continually review the procedures and methodologies they employ in the light of ongoing research and developments in the field and ensure that best practice according to current thinking is applied.

5. Storage

Our collections are maintained in secure storage areas, specially designed to maintain relative humidity and temperature levels consistent with the long term preservation of archival materials as specified in BS 4971:2017 'Conservation and care of archive and library collections'.

The strongrooms have been approved by The National Archives.

Conditions are monitored weekly to ensure they continue to meet the required standards.

Surrey History Centre is committed to reducing its carbon footprint by exploring more environmentally sustainable air conditioning regimes which remain consistent with adherence to BS 4971:2017.

The strongrooms are cleaned regularly and a pest management programme is also in place.

A programme of enhancing secondary packaging of collections is in place as recommended by the National Preservation Office Survey Report, 2005.

6. Processing of newly acquired archives

Preliminary preventive measures will be put in place as soon as a collection is acquired. Collections are checked for dirt, damp, mould and insect infestation and appropriate treatments applied if necessary.

Documents will be packaged and stored in a manner designed to reduce chemical and mechanical damage, through the use of approved archival quality packaging materials.

7. Selection for further treatment

Individual documents or collections that require further preventive measures, conservation treatment and/or copying will be entered on the repair register and rated as either 'Unfit for Production' or 'Assisted Production'. They will be further rated by an archivist according to historical significance and likely level of use. Priority is given to documents which are Unfit for Production and of high historical significance and likely to be in demand by researchers.

Items identified by staff or users in the course of production to the searchroom as needing further treatment are taken to conservation for entry on the repair register. During the Centre's closed fortnight in December and at other times, as resources permit, portions of the holdings may be stockchecked, archival packaging improved and items in need of conservation identified and logged.

Appropriate treatment will be given according to the type of damage and resources available or attainable at the time.

Where extensive treatment of a larger collection is necessary external funding might be sought for a targeted project.

8. Handling and Using Records

Staff and volunteers will receive appropriate training in handling and caring for records. Our users may access records only under supervision and staff are trained to intervene to ensure collections care procedures are followed.

Users are encouraged to read our published guide 'Caring for Our Collections' and in signing the readers' register they agree to abide by the searchroom code of conduct which outlines the key requirements for the safe handling of archives.

Book supports and weights are provided to facilitate safe handling.

Original records for which surrogates exist may not be consulted without permission from an Archives Services Manager.

9. Disaster Prevention, Control and Recovery

Surrey History Centre has a comprehensive disaster prevention, control and recovery plan which covers the measures adopted to minimise the risks of an emergency situation and the actions to be taken in the immediate aftermath of a disaster to safeguard the Centre's holdings. The plan is reviewed annually.

It is linked to the service Business Continuity Plan drawn up as part of Surrey County Council's business continuity strategy.

10. Date of Publication and Review

This policy was first published in March 2017.

Reviewed in September 2020.

Next review: 2023

Appendix**Standards And Key Publications**

BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections

BS EN 16853:2017 Conservation of cultural heritage. Conservation process.
Decision making, planning and implementation

BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location,
construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of
heritage collections

*BS 1153:1992. Recommendations on Processing and Storage of Silver
gelatine type Microfilm.*

European Confederation of Conservators Organisations Code of Ethics (E.C.C.O.)
Professional Guidelines, 2002.

Roger Ellis, *The Principles of Archive Repair*, 1951.

A D Baynes-Cope, *Ethics and the Conservation of Archive Documents*, 1994

The Archives & Records Association, *Preservation and Conservation Best Practice
Guidelines*