

# OXFORDSHIRE HISTORY CENTRE POLICY DOCUMENT PD015

## Archives Acquisition Policy

The objective of this policy is to define what archive material Oxfordshire History Centre will accept for its holdings, the terms on which that material may be held, and any requirements to be observed before material is accepted. While no policy can cover all the possible eventualities of material offered, this policy should be consulted before collections are accepted, and only in exceptional cases should the Archives Manager be consulted with a view to taking in material not covered by it. The acquisition of Local Studies material, photographs and oral history recordings is defined in OHC PD029 (Local Studies Acquisition Policy)

### Geographical area

1] The fundamental requirement of records acquired is that they must relate to Oxfordshire and its inhabitants, unless there is a special prior agreement. Such records may originate anywhere, and there is therefore no geographical limitation on the catchment area from which records may be acquired. However

- (a) records relating to Oxfordshire which are part of a document class belonging elsewhere (an example would be Assize records, which belong with the classes at the National Archives) will not be acquired
- (b) records which are part of a single collection, where the majority of that collection relates to an area outside Oxfordshire, will not be acquired

2] The boundaries of Oxfordshire have changed over the centuries, most drastically when the Vale of White Horse transferred from Berkshire to Oxfordshire in 1974, as a result of the Local Government Act (1972). Provenance dictates that official records should follow the authorities to which they belonged. Thus:

- County Council records covering the Vale of White Horse pre-April 1974 belong in the Berkshire Record Office; those post-March 1974 in the Oxfordshire History Centre.
- Vale of White Horse area District Council records pre-April 1974 belong in the Berkshire Record Office; those post-March 1974 in the Oxfordshire History Centre
- The records of boroughs in the Vale of White Horse (e.g. Abingdon) belong in Berkshire Record Office; borough status vanished in 1974.
- Technically records of Parish Councils in the Vale of the White Horse area should go to Berkshire Record Office pre-April 1974 and to Oxfordshire History Centre post-March 1974. However, individual Councils do not recognise that pre- and post-1974 authorities are not continuous, and may insist on all their records being kept together. If the post-1974 authorities are regarded as the legitimate successors to the functions and records of the pre-1974 authorities, then all the records should be deposited in Oxfordshire History Centre; the Office therefore accepts all Parish Council records within the Vale of White Horse, but does not insist they be deposited with the Oxfordshire History Centre. Jurisdiction for Vale of White Horse state-run schools passed to Oxfordshire County Council in 1974, and such school

records for that area are now a subdivision of County Council records. They should therefore be accepted into this Office. However, (a) this does not apply to school records among parish papers, and (b) if a school has already deposited with Berkshire Record Office they must be given the choice between continuing to deposit there or moving all the records to this Office

3] Coroner's and court records covering the jurisdiction of the Vale of White Horse belong in the Berkshire Record Office pre-April 1974 and in the Oxfordshire History Centre post-March 1974.

4] The ecclesiastical jurisdictions which determine the provenance of Church records were not altered by the Local Government Act (1972). Therefore the Oxfordshire History Centre accepts:

- Diocesan records relating to the whole of Oxford Diocese as it was constituted at the time of the records' being created.
- Archdeaconry records relating to Oxford Archdeaconry, including those parts recently transferred to the newly established Dorchester Archdeaconry, but not Berkshire or Buckingham Archdeaconries.
- Parish records of parishes within Oxford Archdeaconry.

5] For the purposes of privately deposited material, the Vale of White Horse may be regarded as either Oxfordshire or Berkshire. Even where a fonds of material has reference exclusively to the pre- or post-1974 period, it may still prove the prerequisite for understanding something which occurred later, or be the outcome of something which occurred earlier. The situation is further complicated by the fact that private individuals have no obligation to deposit, and may refuse to do so unless in the office of their choice. It is therefore impossible to establish a date before which material should go to Berkshire Record Office and after which to Oxfordshire History Centre. Oxfordshire History Centre therefore accepts all private material from the Vale of White Horse area, provided:

- (a) that the material is not an additional part of a collection already held in Berkshire Record Office
- (b) that it is established as a term of deposit that the existence of the deposit will be made known to Berkshire Record Office, a copy of any finding aid made available to Berkshire Record Office, and a copy of the material supplied to Berkshire Record Office if requested and funded

### Record Types

6] No records will be accepted which do not provide valid information on Oxfordshire or its inhabitants. To be valid, the information must be original in the sense of being a first generation record creation and not a later gloss or précis. It must not exist in the same form, or giving the same information, as material already held in an environment easily accessible to researchers who use Oxfordshire History Centre.

7] Items not relating to Oxfordshire which are integrally bound up with an archive collection may be accepted if they constitute a small part of an overall collection, and then only on the understanding that we may choose to transfer them to another institution if we believe that the collection is valid without them, in line with our deaccessioning and disposal policy (PD033).

8] Original archives are no longer exclusively letter forms on paper or parchment. It is possible for a videotape, CD, DVD or electronic-format record to constitute a valid archive, and Oxfordshire History Centre will accept them. A Digital Deposit form must be completed by anyone depositing or donating such records.

9] There are very few records which the Office has a legal obligation to accept. County Council minutes would fall under this head, but not supporting files or documentation. The Office has an obligation to accept the Diocesan Archives, but only those items which contain significant information for the history of the county. Parish records must be accepted, but the obligation is for the major classes only: registers, minutes, accounts, poor law papers. There is no obligation to accept the records of the District Councils, schools, parish councils, or private records, although any of these categories may contain material which is highly desirable. Oxfordshire History Centre is authorised to accept Public Records and manorial records, but is not the only Oxfordshire repository which can do so.

10] The Bodleian Library does not take in material of exclusively local interest, although it does possess dedicated collections (notably Top Oxon) of this sort. It does accept material of national and international interest, and therefore may take papers of an Oxfordshire individual considered to have wider than purely local significance. It is authorised to accept manorial records.

11] Oxfordshire Health Archives is responsible for the records of the former Health Authority, the NHS Trusts, and individual hospitals, many of which are Public Records. Oxfordshire History Centre does not accept this material except by arrangement with the Health Archivist.

12] Oxford City Council is a separate record-creating body, and nominally holds its own archive in Oxford Town Hall. However, as there are no searchroom facilities or permanent archive staff based at the Town Hall, the core, catalogued collection is held and made available for consultation at OHC.

#### Legal Stipulations

13] Archive material may not be accepted by Oxfordshire History Centre without a formal accession agreement signed by the depositor/donor and, if appropriate, a completed Data Protection Questionnaire. County Council records will be accepted by internal transfer with control transferred or withheld and Church of England records by deposit. The terms of all other record types must be agreed individually with the depositor/donor from the standard form categories listed on the accession receipt form.

14] Records may be kept closed throughout the period that they remain uncatalogued (see PD016), although Oxfordshire History Centre may agree additional closure periods at the time of accessioning. Closure requests on Data Protection grounds will be accepted without question if the depositor retains ownership of the documents and, therefore, remains Data Controller. However, if ownership has passed to the Office, closure under data protection will be decided by the Office, with due consideration given to any comments made by the donor/depositor at any time. If the depositor wishes to close records on non-legal grounds:

- (a) They should be asked why they want them closed.
- (b) They should be asked what proportion of the records they want closed.
- (c) They should be asked how long they want them closed for; this must be stated in years, not “for my lifetime” or a similarly uncertain period.

Any closure can be accepted only if it is fair; a collection cannot be closed to particular individuals or groups of individuals unless those individuals can be clearly shown to be working against the interests of the depositor.

15] Depositors may place reasonable conditions on the deposit. However:

- (a) This must not include stipulations on what research the material can be used for, except where this is enjoined by legislation (e.g. Data Protection).
- (b) Where such conditions are likely to place additional work or obligations on the office, they must be agreed by the Archives Manager.

16] No cataloguing deadlines for material deposited may be given unless agreed by the Archives Manager. Offering to pay to have the material catalogued ahead of other deposits can only be negotiated if the collection is deemed a high priority (according to the office’s criteria) and the sum is sufficient to bring in additional cataloguing staff so that the existing cataloguing programme is not disturbed. Depositors who withdraw material after it has been catalogued will be expected to indemnify the Office for the time taken in that cataloguing, as detailed in section 3 of our Terms of Deposit.

17] Any individual depositing C20th or C21st material which mentions named individuals who may still be alive must be asked whether, to the best of their knowledge or understanding, the collection contains anything which is caught by Data Protection legislation. If it does, a Data Protection Questionnaire should be signed by the depositor and kept with the accession form.

#### Possible bars to acceptance

18] To ensure compliance with Data Protection legislation, Oxfordshire History Centre may choose to reject any individual record or collection of records containing personal data, where it is believed that a data subject mentioned in that record or collection of records did not consent to the compilation of the data and/or personal data therein is believed to be inaccurate/unreliable and/or unnecessarily detailed

19] To ensure compliance with Data Protection legislation, Oxfordshire History Centre may choose to reject any record or collection of records containing personal data of a sensitive nature (as defined by the Data Protection Act, s.2 – see Definition 7 of DPA Definitions in folder 1.4.1.4 on the shared drive), where it is not considered to be in the substantial public interest to keep them.

20] Oxfordshire History Centre will not accept unnecessary material or material of no or limited value Potential depositors are expected to compile a boxlist detailing the nature and extent of the material, and await confirmation of the Office’s willingness to accept the material before arranging delivery. Depositors are expected to weed out anything which is clearly of limited interest before deposit. Further guidance can be found in our Guidelines for Depositors (Archives) and Terms of Deposit. If material is brought in without weeding, it should normally be accepted only on the understanding that the Office may wish to return or destroy some of the material.

Under no circumstances should material be unconditionally accepted without a knowledge of its contents; depositors must be informed that we may contact them again after assessing the collection to return or destroy part of it. In addition to an initial assessment, further material may be weeded out at a later date, including at the point of cataloguing, as specified in our De-accessioning policy (PD033).

21] Space in the History Centre is limited and the space which can be made available for a collection is directly proportional to the assessed importance of the collection. As specified in 20 above, potential depositors will be required to provide a boxlist detailing the content and extent of the collection before arranging delivery

22] As stated in our de-accessioning policy (PD033), material will not be accepted if it has suffered damage which reduces its value as historical evidence, or would require a disproportionate amount of conservation work to make it usable. Material which is illegible will not be accepted. Material of this nature discovered after the collection has been deposited will be assessed by the Conservation Unit, and if found unacceptable will be returned to the depositor or destroyed. No material will be accepted which poses a threat to other holdings of the Office through infestation or similar. Any documents accepted which are framed or mounted may have the frames and mounts removed to protect the original material and for ease of storage. Digital material which has deteriorated to such an extent that it is unusable, or which is in a format or operating system which OHC cannot access, will not be accepted. Once deposited, OHC retains the right to migrate and re-arrange digital files as necessary in order to ensure their continued accessibility whenever possible. However, potential depositors must note that financial and other considerations may prevent this being done, and the Office cannot take responsibility for the original media eventually being unreadable.

23] No material will be accepted which in any way endangers the health or safety of members of staff, or the collection of which does so.

24] Oxfordshire History Centre cannot undertake to collect records offered within a particular timeframe. Particularly in the case of large collections, it may be some time before the necessary numbers of staff are available simultaneously to organize a pickup. If there are external pressures on depositors (e.g. anticipated loss of the storage area for the records) the Office will do whatever is possible, but the core activities of the service will not be disrupted for document collection.

25] Oxfordshire History Centre will not accept material which has legal liabilities attached to it, or where there is any form of doubt about the status of the collection. In particular no material will be accepted where the ownership is unclear.

26] Oxfordshire History Centre will not accept any material which renders it subject to financial liability. Records with current administrative applications will not be accepted; records must have ceased to be valid for current administrative purposes before the Office will take them on. The only exceptions to this are records of ongoing administrative validity from Oxfordshire County Council, the parent organization, where custody of records may be accepted while responsibility remains with the depositor. If records are offered to the Office for sale, the matter must be referred to the Archives Manager for decision.

Outreach for archive material

27] Oxfordshire History Centre has a commitment to searching out material of value for the history of the county and its inhabitants. However, this cannot override the core functions of cataloguing and public service, and may be put in abeyance if resources are inadequate to pursue it.

28] The following types of material will be sought out as a priority:

- Material which the office has a legal responsibility to hold
- Material from areas which are inadequately represented in the current collections and which will provide a fuller picture of Oxfordshire and the communities within it

Material of types which review shows are already heavily used within the Office, or for which stakeholders have made requests

29] Every month, requests for collections to be catalogued will be reviewed and specific priorities determined for material which is to be targeted for acquisition. Criteria for OHC's cataloguing priorities are detailed in PD006

30] Oxfordshire History Centre will maintain and update guidelines for depositors, to ensure that depositors carry out preliminary sorting and disposal of unsuitable material.

31] In certain cases, Oxfordshire History Centre may work with external community groups to enable them to maintain archival material which cannot be taken into the custody of the Office. In such cases, the Office will hold catalogues/images of this material, so that its informational content can be made available to researchers in the public searchroom.

32] Purchase of archival collections is not normally an option, as no budget exists for that purpose. No commitment to purchase material may be entered into by any member of staff except the Archives Manager.

Practical stipulations

33] The rota designates an archivist to be on accession duty each week. When an accession is brought into the Office, that archivist must be summoned to deal with it, unless for some reason s/he is unavailable, in which case the professional on duty in the searchroom should deal with it.

Carl Boardman

6 August 2003

(amended for purposes of Data Protection Act by Giles Morris, January 2004)

Revised October 2008 and February 2012

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Revised July 2014 by Mark Priddey, and March 2015 by Hannah Jones and Mark Priddey

Review date: March 2016