

OXFORDSHIRE HISTORY CENTRE

POLICY DOCUMENT PD005

Conservation & Preservation Policy

Purpose, Scope and Standards

The purpose of this policy is to state the guiding principles and the practice of all preservation activities within the Oxfordshire History Centre (OHC). Conservation and preservation are fundamental responsibilities of the History Centre and should underlie all activities undertaken by it. Preservation issues govern how we acquire, store, handle, access and exhibit the collections and all members of staff are involved.

Definition of Terms

Preservation is defined as all actions intended to ensure the current and long term survival of the physical holdings of OHC. Preventive preservation refers to all activities undertaken for the preventative care of the archives and local studies materials without any active, interventive treatment.

Conservation is defined as all interventive actions, whether physical or chemical, designed to improve or maintain the physical condition of individual archives and local studies materials.

Standards

Oxfordshire History Centre aims to conform to the following national standards in its preservation work:

- PD5454: Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials
- BS4971: Repair and allied processes for the conservation of documents.
- The National Archives Standard for Records Repositories, 2004
- PAS 198: Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections, 2012

Management and Resourcing

- OHC maintains a Conservation Unit managed by a professional conservator who undertakes to maintain links with the professional community and maintain professional standards. The Conservation Manager is an active member of the OHC Management Team.
- The conservation and preservation implications of all OHC policies must be considered at the highest level via the Management Team. The preservation impact of any project must be included in the planning process and consultation with the proper staff must be ongoing
- The Conservation Unit via the management team will decide on work priorities which are incorporated into the OHC service plan. This will

enable resources to be properly allocated and to ensure that care is focused on those collections most requiring it.

- OHC will commit dedicated resources and funding to preservation and conservation activities as well as seeking sources of external funding as appropriate for individual projects.

Staffing

- All conservation work will be carried out by professionally-trained and accredited conservation staff.
- Preservation work will routinely be undertaken by all staff and on occasion by volunteers. Volunteers undertaking such work will first be trained as appropriate and will work under the direction and supervision of Conservation staff.
- All new members of staff will be given preservation training and appropriate refresher training should be provided as appropriate and when required.

Storage, Security and Environment

- All material will be housed in appropriate accommodation that adheres to PD5454 and national standards as closely as possible. OHC was designed to conform to the standards laid out in the British Standard for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents
- The History Centre building is regularly maintained and environmentally controlled and monitored. Regular monitoring of the environment and for pests and infestations should take place.
- All plant and equipment is regularly maintained by authorised personnel. The fabric of the building itself should also be checked on a regular basis to ensure its stability.
- Access to the storage areas is carefully controlled. All storage areas will be kept locked and are electrically isolated at the end of each day.
- Periodic cleaning of the strongrooms is carried out to maintain the conditions and as part of pest control.
- Materials requiring different or special environmental conditions are grouped together as much as possible with separately controlled storage areas for digital material, tape and photographic collections, maintained to suitable conditions as far as is possible within the constraints of the building.

- Volatile materials such as particularly flammable material or infested or mouldy material should be isolated on arrival and treated until it is safe to be stored with the other collections. Highly flammable material will not be stored inside the building.
- Any collections stored remotely, either at Westgate, Holton or the Town Hall should be periodically monitored for condition and environmental stability.

Preservation and Conservation Work

- OHC aims to protect every document in its custody so that it is not at risk from harm whilst being stored, exhibited or produced for public use. All conservation and preservation treatment is taken in accordance with nationally recognised and agreed ethical and technical standards, with particular reference to BS 4971, the British Standard for Archive Conservation.
- Conservation staff should be kept aware and trained as to current practice, and this knowledge and understanding should be spread throughout OHC as appropriate through management team, meetings or other cascaded training.
- Items requiring either preventive or interventive treatments may be identified in a number of ways: during accessioning, cataloguing processes and use in the Searchroom. Need is reported and recorded on an electronic reporting system.
- All new material is assessed to determine its physical condition and basic cleaning and packaging will be undertaken where necessary as part of the accessioning process before the material enters the strongrooms (see systems' document SD011 Dealing with Dirty or Unpackaged Archival Material). This may also include removal of metal clips, unsuitable packaging materials and basic stabilisation. When required, the Conservation Unit may provide assistance or more specific or specialised packaging or treatment at this accessioning stage.
- During cataloguing, the cataloguer should consult with the conservator to ensure that any or all material requiring special, individual packaging, whether a single local studies volume or a whole archive collection, is properly protected. Packaging and wrapping will be performed by cataloguing staff, where possible simple tasks will be done as soon as possible by conservation staff but items requiring lengthier, more specialized treatment will be reported and assessed...
- A programme of repackaging older archive and local studies collections to conform to new standards is incorporated into the office's forward plan. This work may also be carried out by volunteers. This material is identified by both frequency of use and periodic survey.

- Every two months, the Conservation Manager and Archives Manager will agree upon items requiring interventive treatment. Input from OHC staff will assist in determining priorities.
- Material is assessed for its suitability for treatment based on established criteria of condition, use, importance, whether a surrogate is available, as well as the workflow within the Conservation Unit.
- All treatment should be sympathetic to the needs of the item and its end purpose. Treatment is documented on the Damaged Documents' spreadsheet and records kept including those for materials used in processes.
- Where possible, all material is packaged in containers appropriate to their format and physical needs and which are constructed from the best archival quality materials available.
- Materials used for interventive treatments should be of appropriate suitability.

Access and Handling

- Access should be given to as much documentation as possible however consideration will always be made as to the potential damage to an item before production. OHC will provide surrogates rather than original material unless there is a positive reason for using the originals (such as visual impairment or the need to study something not visible on the copy). Preservation of original material must always be a priority.
- When original material is too damaged to produce, staff will explain the reasons without delay and OHC will take what action it can to make the material available as soon as possible. For fuller details, see policy document PD018 Use of surrogates of original material,
- All staff are trained in handling techniques as part of their induction and supplementary training on safe handling and lifting should be given when available.
- Researchers must agree to abide by the searchroom regulations controlling all aspects of searchroom conduct, from the number of documents that may be consulted at a time to the use of pencils rather than pens. A copy of the regulations is freely available.
- Guidelines on how to handle archival material are placed in the searchroom and researchers are informed of them and a copy available for them to take. Searchroom staff will supervise researchers' use of the archives.
- Staff will actively promote good handling techniques both in the searchroom and in lectures and tours to external groups.

- Handling aids, such as gloves, cushions, weights, polyester sleeves etc. are made available in the searchroom.
- While fewer handling requirements are applied to local studies material, the use of cushions and gloves is still encouraged where it is considered appropriate for the safe handling of particularly vulnerable or delicate items.
- All material should be properly handled and moved within OHC making use of boxes, trolleys and using an appropriate number of staff as required.
- Material must be transported correctly when taken outside OHC. Archives must be packaged in a manner suitable for the journey they are to make, to give them proper protection from the environment and possible accident.

Exhibition and Loans

- Exhibited material must be displayed in a way that will not cause damage.
- Depositors withdrawing material for exhibition elsewhere must be made aware of the preservation and security issues involved and must undertake to keep the documents in suitable and secure conditions. Conservation advice may be offered in such circumstances. Withdrawn material will be examined before and after loan for evidence of damage.
- Exhibition duration cannot be indefinite as light damage, even in rooms that meet the levels required in PD5454, is incremental and prolonged exposure can be detrimental to the condition of documents.

Copying

- All photocopying or scanning of original, archival material must be carried out by staff.
- No archival material may be copied if it risks damage. Photocopying or scanning in particular may cause significant damage and guidelines are freely available as to what may and may not be copied. All staff should be conversant with what may be copied. When in doubt they should always refer to a member of the office's Management Team
- Researchers may copy local studies material themselves but searchroom staff should check the material researchers intend to copy when supplying them with copier cards and, if necessary, suggest the most careful method of photocopying.
- Researchers may copy microform directly using the facilities in the searchroom; staff should be trained to assist in this when necessary.

- Digital photographs may be provided when photocopying or scanning is not possible.
- After purchasing a permit, researchers may take their own digital photographs, using their own camera but the use of flash is not permissible.

Emergency Preparedness

- OHC will maintain its plan for use in the event of a major incident. This plan should include procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency and information such as staff out-of-hours contact details. There should be a scheduled programme of updating the plan to ensure that the information it contains is accurate and relevant and an external authority should validate the plan.
- Staff should be made aware of the plan and a regular programme of training events should be held to help all staff familiarise themselves with the plan as well as the equipment and materials available to deal with such an incident as well as a chance to run through possible scenarios and reactions.

Copies of the plan will be stored externally with the Fire Brigade and the Emergency Planning Unit as well as at other departmental sites.

- A system is in place to enable out-of-hours contact with a responsible member of staff at all times.

Preservation of Records Held Elsewhere Within Oxfordshire

- OHC will encourage good practice to owners of private archives and provide advice on the physical care of their documents.

Updated by Rosemary Hamilton (Conservation Manager) & Mark Priddey (Archives Manager), March 2015:

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