

LIVERPOOL RECORD OFFICE AND LOCAL STUDIES AND MERSEYSIDE RECORD OFFICE

PRESERVATION POLICY

Introduction

Preservation can be defined as indirect action used to slow deterioration and prevent further damage. At Liverpool Record Office and Local Studies and Merseyside Record Office we aim to place preservation at the heart of everything we do. This enables us to make informed decisions on the handling, packaging, storage, and conservation of our collections, in turn ensuring that Liverpool's archival heritage remains available and accessible for future generations.

Storage

- The condition of all new deposits is assessed, and Conservation staff notified of any items requiring conservation treatment.
- All items are packaged using archival quality products and stored in secure repositories. We aim to maintain the environment of these storage areas as far as we can in compliance with British Standard 5454:2000 'Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents'. Conditions are monitored at all times by data loggers which take readings of the ambient temperature and relative humidity every 30 minutes.
- A practice of good housekeeping is regularly maintained within the repositories.

Conservation and Preservation

The conservation work that we carry out at Liverpool Record Office and Local Studies and Merseyside Record Office can be split into two very distinct areas: Preventive and Remedial. **Preventive conservation** consists of activities which ensure the long term preservation of our collections. These include:

- The correct handling of archival items: All staff are given annual document handling training. This enables staff to handle items correctly themselves and provide guidance to members of the public. Additionally we provide users with document handling recommendations on each desk in the Searchroom.
- The correct use of documents: This is achieved by providing adequate protection and support for all items while they are being viewed. Additionally we request that searchers do not lean on or mark items in any way; that they

use pencil only to take notes; that they wear protective gloves where appropriate; and that they do not eat or drink while in the Searchroom.

- Surrogates/ Substitution: We have a regular programme of outsourced microfilming which we review and prioritise annually. We highlight heavily used items and very fragile material for microfilming. This work is carried out by a recognized bureau who work to archival standards to produce a 35mm master negative; a duplicate; and a working copy for each item. Additionally we have an ongoing digitisation programme. This work has thus far resulted in the reduced handling of our photograph and watercolour collections. Where available, users are expected to view surrogate formats rather than cause original items further damage.
- The correct storage of documents: All items are packaged and stored to the standards stated above.
- Bespoke preservation packaging such as encapsulation and phase boxing are carried out by Conservation staff.

Remedial Conservation embodies direct action carried out on damaged or deteriorated items with the aim of slowing future deterioration. All conservation work is carried out in compliance with British Standard 4971:2002 'Repair and Allied Processes for the Conservation of Documents – Recommendations', and the *E.C.C.O.*¹ professional ethics and guidelines.

- Before treatment, all items undergo a diagnostic examination. This determines the composition and condition of the item; evaluates the causes of deterioration; identifies the extent and nature of any alterations; and determines the type and extent of the treatment needed. All findings are thoroughly documented.
- The integrity of the items on which we are working is maintained. A principle of minimal intervention is applied at all times for this reason.
- Items requiring conservation are prioritised. Factors that guide these decisions are how frequently an item is used; the amount and type of damage; and the items historical significance.
- We keep abreast of new developments in conservation by reading professional journals; attending conferences and courses; correspondence with other conservators; and visits to other services.

Emergency Planning

- Our Disaster Control Plan and Disaster Reaction Plan are regularly maintained and updated as necessary. We provide all staff with annual disaster training in which we explain and demonstrate correct salvage and recovery procedures.
- We conduct regular risk assessment inspections to minimize the risk of a disaster.

¹ European Confederation of Conservator-Restorer's Organisations

Exhibitions

When exhibiting archives their preservation is paramount. Thus the composition and condition of items; the duration of the exhibition; the environmental conditions and the security of the venue are all taken into consideration.

- When exhibiting items in-house we ensure that they are fully supported; that high light levels are restricted as far as possible and that display cases are secure. We also monitor the interior environment of display cases as necessary.
- When items are requested for external exhibition we ensure that they are in a suitable condition to be displayed. We discuss light levels and display methods with the host venue, and write individual condition reports for each item. We package items appropriately for safe transfer to the exhibition venue, and provide materials, supports and advice as necessary to ensure that no item comes to harm whilst on display.
- Written guidelines are available to advise on the safe handling, transport and display of archival items. The host venue receives these guidelines as appropriate.
- A 'Receipt for Items on Loan' form is completed by the host venue on receipt of items. This form is then kept on file for the duration of the exhibition.
- We strongly recommend the use of facsimiles for long term display.

Public Use

- We encourage our users to make effective use of our finding aids. This prevents the unnecessary use and removal of un-wanted items from storage.
- Allowing access to our archival collections is a priority. However we will not produce items which are in very poor condition; those which are 'closed' for legal reasons; or those which have surrogate copies (see Conservation and Preservation section above).

Reprographics

A photocopying service is available to our users in the Searchroom. To ensure that no item is unnecessarily damaged by this procedure, our staff will handle and photocopy items.

Photocopying is a convenient and inexpensive way of reproducing books and documents but there are risks involved when copying archival items and certain restrictions must apply. The main risks arise from:

- The handling and support of the item while copying.
- The light source from the photocopier: Light exposure is one of the main causes of deterioration in paper documents. This damage is permanent and accumulative. Therefore if multiple copies are required of an item, one copy should be taken, then used as a surrogate to produce further copies.

The following items are not recommended for photocopying:

- Fragile documents
- Tightly bound volumes
- Very large maps
- Deeds or other items with seals
- Deeds with multiple membranes

Alternatively, members of the public may use their own digital camera to reproduce an item. The restrictions and risks associated with photocopying remain the same when taking a digital image however. We therefore ask that searchers refrain from using the flash on their camera.

External Advice

Our Conservation staff are happy to provide advice on the preservation of personal records and memorabilia. Alternatively contact:

Institute of Conservation
3rd Floor
Downstream Building
1 London Bridge
London, SE1 9BG
Tel: 020 7785 3805
www.icon.org.uk

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Manager – Record Office.

Acknowledgements

The National Preservation Office guidelines 'Building Blocks for a Preservation Policy' have been observed in the writing of this policy.

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