

City of Westminster Archives Centre

Conservation and Preservation Policy

January 2016



City of Westminster

Contents

- 1. Aims of the Conservation and Preservation Policy**
- 2. Principles of the Conservation and Preservation Policy**
 - a. Management
 - b. Conservation and Preservation Issues
- 3. The Environment**
 - a. The Building
 - i. Environmental Monitoring and Control
 - ii. Pest and Infestation Management
 - iii. Security
 - b. Storage Facilities and Packaging
 - c. Cleaning and Housekeeping
 - d. Health and Safety
 - e. Pollution
- 4. Collections Care**
 - a. Collections Acquisitions, Management and Development Policy
 - b. Appraisal of Collections
 - c. Exhibitions and Loans
 - d. Display Cases
 - e. Search Room Practice and Transportation
 - f. Preservation Awareness
 - g. Volunteers
- 5. Reprographics**
 - a. Microfilming
 - b. Scanning Service
 - c. Photocopying
 - d. Other Methods
- 6. Disaster Preparedness**
 - a. Emergency Disaster Plan
 - b. Flooding and Leaks
 - c. Fire Precautions and Fire Alarm Evacuation Procedures
- 7. Monitoring and Review**

THE CITY OF WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES CENTRE MISSION

Westminster City Archives aims to provide a centre of excellence, where archives and local studies materials are acquired, preserved and made accessible, and in so doing record the built environment and significant events, organisations and individuals who have contributed to the City of Westminster's remarkable life, both past and present. The service aims to meet Westminster City Council's key objectives, stimulating a sense of community identity and raising the profile of Westminster's unique heritage within a global context.

The collections contain bound volumes of printed or manuscript material, papers of organisations or individuals, pamphlets, periodicals, newspaper cuttings, maps, plans, prints and photographs, theatre playbills and programmes.

1. Aims of the Conservation and Preservation Policy

All paper collections tend towards natural deterioration over time, but they can also be destroyed by unstable environmental conditions, acidity, light, pollution, biological enemies, poor handling and storage, theft, fire and flood.

Collections care and conservation are of central importance to the preservation and exploitation of Westminster's written and visual heritage. The Conservation and Preservation Policy sets out the appropriate practice for the care and management of the collections and illustrates to outside bodies that conservation issues are handled in a co-ordinated and professional manner. For maximum effectiveness, the plan is circulated to all outside partners, contractors, managers and staff.

To safeguard the cultural significance and physical integrity of the collections, a combination of preventative and interventive conservation measures are employed. The key collections care and conservation issues are as follows:

- a. To ensure conservation and preservation practice follow the latest techniques and best practice standards, for example PD 5454:2012, with the ultimate aim of keeping the collections accessible
- b. To raise preservation awareness among staff, volunteers and users through appropriate training and notices
- c. To minimise or eliminate the risk to collections through control of the environment in which they are stored, consulted and displayed

2. Principles of the Conservation and Preservation Policy

The Archives Centre's objectives highlight the importance of a comprehensive conservation and preservation strategy following the recommendations of PD5454:2012 for full air-conditioning (stable temperature of 13-20°C and relative humidity of 35-60%), separate air-handling units per floor with back-up generator,

eight air changes per hour, 10% intake of fresh air, an intruder alarm, fire alarm, panic alarm and CCTV system linked to monitoring stations.

2.a. Management

The responsibility for conservation and preservation matters, including the Five Year Conservation Plan, is exercised by the Conservator in collaboration with the Archives Manager and other senior members of staff.

2.b. Conservation and Preservation Issues

The term **conservation** refers to the active treatment of materials in order to stabilise them physically and make them accessible whereas **preservation** refers to the broader activity of collections care associated with correct storage and packaging.

Items selected for conservation and preservation treatments are assessed according to the following priorities:

- a. Historical significance of the item
- b. Anticipated level of use
- c. Physical condition
- d. Cost of treatment

The prioritisation of conservation treatments is based on following criteria:

- a. New materials are examined and treated if necessary before joining the collections in storage
- b. Materials about to be microfilmed or loaned to exhibitions are evaluated and steps are taken to stabilise their condition
- c. Items requiring attention before being handled by users receive minimum preventative treatments to ensure their safety
- a. Depending upon funding resources, wider conservation projects are carried out by external conservators

Conservation and preservation projects carried out in-house or by external conservators will be based on the following principles:

- a. Every treatment is documented for future reference
- b. All materials must be of archival standards
- c. All repairs must be reversible
- d. All repairs should respect the integrity of the original object
- e. No repairs should conceal documentary evidence
- f. No repairs should attempt to restore missing information
- g. No repairs should attempt to restore to an original condition

Adhesives used in conservation must have the following properties:

- a. Sufficient strength
- b. No tendency to discolour
- c. Reversibility
- d. No acidity
- e. Long shelf-life

- f. Ease of preparation

3. The Environment

3. a. The Building

The Archives Centre was purpose-built in 1994 and arranged over five and a half floors with a ground floor area of 21 m x 21 m = 441 sq m. The approximate total floor area of the building is 2,136.7 sq m. The three strong rooms contain five kilometres of shelving.

High-standard conservation and preservation facilities are housed in a generously- proportioned studio on the 4th floor.

3. a. i. Environmental Monitoring and Control

The three floors dedicated to storage of archival materials are devoid of openings that could allow external contamination and exposure to light. Temperature, relative humidity, dust and large particle pollutants are screened by a computerised Building Management System, which is checked and maintained by an external maintenance company Amey, who employ software sub-contractors Kendra. Only staff offices, conference and reading rooms are fitted with heating. Windows and fluorescent light tubes as well as the display cases have ultraviolet protection film installed.

3. a. ii. Pest and Infestation Management

The risk of infestation is relatively low as the building is constructed and maintained according to high standards; nevertheless, preventative measures are carried out including regular monitoring and setting of traps every six weeks by a council contractor. Traps in the strong rooms and conservation studio are checked by the conservator regularly every three weeks.

All new acquisitions are appraised by the archivists in the donors' premises and materials suspected of being mouldy are temporarily placed in the Dispatch Room, where they are treated by the Conservator. After they have undergone treatment, they are moved to the 4th floor spare room, where they remain for at least two months. After this period, they will be re-assessed, and if there is no sign of any re-infestation, they will be moved to the storage areas. For this period of two months, it is strictly prohibited to store any material which will be subsequently transferred to another part of the building in the **Dispatch Room**, as it has been potentially infested.

The **Mould Outbreak Management Plan and Safety Procedures** are distributed to all staff and notes on how to deal with mould are displayed in the Dispatch Room.

3. a. iii. Security

Public access to the building is continuously monitored by an intruder alarm system linked to a monitoring station and the Reading Room is supervised during opening times. Access to storage areas is restricted to staff only. The coded

passenger lift allows public access from the ground floor to the Reading Room located on the 5th floor.

3. b. Storage Facilities and Packaging

The present storage facilities adhere to high standards following PD 5454:2012 for the storage and exhibition of archival materials. Mobile metal shelving is in use throughout the storage areas which is free of buckling, twisting, corrosion or other signs of deterioration and is in full working order. Access aids appropriate to the shelving, for example ladders or kick-stools, are provided that meet health and safety requirements. Items enjoy secondary protection according to their format, with most of them boxed. All materials used for the packaging of collections are of archival quality and provide protection from the perils of handling, contact with potentially damaging surfaces, environmental fluctuations, water, smoke and fire.

3. c. Cleaning and Housekeeping

The employment of strict environmental controls makes regular housekeeping in storage areas unnecessary, but all staff have been trained to exercise caution regarding the tidiness of all spaces within the building. Commercial cleaners are not allowed into the strong rooms and conservation studio.

3. d. Health and Safety

Two members of staff have been trained to provide first aid in the event of minor accidents to staff and public within the building.

3. e. Pollution

Pollution may come from both internal and external sources such as:

- a. Volatile organic emissions from new decorations, ageing paints, glues and pigments
- b. Emissions from the objects themselves
- c. Traffic pollution

Carbon filters installed in the Building Management System aim to remove large particle pollutants and dirt from the air supply in the storage rooms. Within the public search room the carbon dioxide levels are monitored in order to control the fresh air and re-circulated air to maintain comfort levels.

4. Collections Care

4. a. Collections Acquisitions, Management and Development Policy

The Archives Centre receives donations and indefinite loans of documents and buys both new and second-hand materials. Any items deemed fragile, mouldy or otherwise at risk are assessed by the Conservator. A **Collections Acquisitions, Management and Development Policy** is available online for reference.

4. b. Appraisal of Collections

Condition and collection surveys of holdings are of paramount importance because they contain useful information about access, use, accommodation, condition and usability, value and importance, artefact type and type of damage.

Through regular checks and surveys, the materials can be classified as “Fit,” “Unfit” and “At Risk”, and thereafter a strategy can be implemented for the remedy of problems recognised. “Unfit” items are not available for public access. “At Risk” items are only available under close supervision.

In addition Conservation Notification Forms are in use by staff to identify damaged items.

4. c. Exhibitions and Loans

There is a programme of temporary exhibitions drawn from the collections, for which display cases in the Reading Room are used. They are changed every two months to avoid prolonged exposure to light.

Materials requested for loans to temporary exhibitions outside the Archives Centre are conserved by the Conservator when necessary before their dispatch. The Conservator is responsible for the objects’ safe transportation and accompanying documents. Borrowing institutions are required to provide written information as to their compliance with standards for exhibitions before approval of the loan. Guidelines are available in the **Agreement for Loans to Temporary Exhibitions**.

All materials requested for publication in various media are previously assessed and treated if necessary.

4. d. Display Cases

Display cases are the single most important aid to the preservation of materials on show. The existing cases are constructed of inert materials, lined with ultraviolet filters, and with locks fitted.

4. e. Search Room Practice and Transportation

Most readers in the Archives Centre are researching the history of their family, but also buildings, local and social history. The 258.7 sq m Reading Room is equipped with architect-designed furniture, a dedicated space for consulting oversized documents, adequate microfilm and microfiche readers, and free Internet access. There is a passenger lift with coded controls and fire escape stairs. The Reading Room is protected by a 3M security system detecting electronic security book tags.

Readers are supplied with written guidelines, and staff play an active role in assisting them in the safe handling of documents. High standards of preservation are maintained through the use of acid-free page markers, a variety of cushions and weights to support books, cotton gloves for handling photographs and the exclusive use of pencils. An ordering system by request slip is used for security.

Special trolleys, operated by staff, and a dedicated lift are provided for the transportation of materials from storage to other areas of the building.

Microfilm readers, reader printers and photocopying facilities are provided in the Reading Room. Staff can also provide a digital scanning service subject to guidelines in the **Digital Preservation Policy**. Readers are allowed to do self-service photography where the items required are subject to photocopying restrictions outlined in the **Photocopying Policy**.

4. f. Preservation Awareness

Preservation awareness is promoted to the public through printed notices in the search room, a specially designed leaflet, open days, talks and tours. The Conservator provides advice to libraries and other departments of the Council as well as to individuals through talks and workshops for adults and interactive activities for school children. Refresher training in handling archival materials is provided to staff once a year and more regularly to volunteers. New members of staff receive training soon after starting.

4. g. Volunteers

The Conservation Studio offers experience to a large group of volunteers carrying out preservation work. The diverse team consists of NADFAS volunteers (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies), conservation students, university students from foreign academic programmes and high school students doing work experience as well as Westminster residents and Friends of the Archives. Volunteers receive appropriate training and their work is under constant supervision. In return for their efforts, volunteers gain new and interesting skills, enhance their communication abilities and build their teamwork confidence through in-house training and supervision and an innovative programme of visits to other organisations to foster their professional development. The impact of volunteering is measured through exit feedback forms.

5. Reprographics

5. a. Microfilming

The most popular series of records such as parish registers and rate books have been preserved on microfilm/fiche. Written specifications incorporating recognised standards are provided for microfilming of material by contractor companies. Before the projects start handling training is given to the contractors by the Conservator.

For business continuity the master negative microfilm collection (a total of 1,089 microfilms) is stored off-site.

5. b. Scanning Service

An in-house scanning service is offered to the public supplying copies as digital prints or files. Only material up to A3 that can lie flat on the scanner can be scanned. Details of the standards of the scanning service are contained in the **Digitisation Preservation Policy**.

5. c. Photocopying

Written guidelines for the correct use of materials and equipment are on display in the vicinity of the photocopying machine. More detail is provided in the **Photocopying Policy** available at the enquiry desk.

5. d. Other Methods

Parish registers and rate books are among the popular series of records included in the Westminster Collection available on the Internet at www.findmypast.co.uk.

6. Disaster Preparedness

6. a. Emergency Disaster Plan

A disaster can be an act of vandalism, fire, earthquake or flood and can cause significant damage. The best protection against any kind of disaster is prevention.

The seven goals of a disaster plan are:

- a. To identify hazards and eliminate or minimise the risk of occurrence
- b. To ensure that staff receive up-to-date training
- c. To provide emergency equipment and ensure it is regularly maintained
- d. To ensure the building and facilities are regularly inspected so that compliance and best practice are observed
- e. To maintain links with outside agencies (emergency services, utilities and all service providers) to advise them of appropriate action required in the event of various disaster scenarios
- f. To re-establish normal activities quickly and efficiently
- g. To learn from past problems in order to prevent recurrence

The disaster plan includes arrangements for salvaging items and a floor plan of their locations. A contract with Document SOS Limited and practical in-house disaster response exercises prepare the archives service for dealing with an emergency. In addition, emergency equipment is stocked within the building (Dispatch Room cabinet).

6. b. Flooding and Leaks

A leak alarm situated in the Conservation Studio detects water leakage throughout the 4th floor offices and staff room. The storage rooms below are of a special water-sealed construction in order to minimise the risk of leaks.

6. c. Fire Precautions and Fire Alarm Evacuation Procedures

Arrangements are in place to ensure that the Fire Brigade is familiar with the layout, contents and purpose of the building. Fire alarm evacuation written procedures and practical training are available to all staff and volunteers. All areas are equipped with smoke detectors, and the strong rooms and Reading Room are monitored by a Stratos high-sensitivity smoke detection system. The fire alarm is linked to Southern Monitoring Services.

7. Monitoring and Review

Although the Conservation and Preservation Policy lays out guidelines for the safety and accessibility of the Archives Centre's collections, the aims for the future are:

- a. Increased awareness among staff and users regarding conservation and preservation practices
- b. Increased accessibility through the creation of surrogate copies, improvements in storage and the use of condition surveys

The Conservation and Preservation Policy is updated annually with the next scheduled for January 2017.