

Collections Care and Conservation Policy

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Introduction

Gwent Archives' mission is to collect, preserve and make accessible records relating to the area it serves.

Gwent Archives collects archives to:

- Provide evidence for the accountability of public institutions, decision-makers and opinion-formers thereby helping safeguard the democratic and legal rights of the citizen

- Provide evidence on all aspects of life in the region, past and present

For this to happen it is imperative that access is available to the Collection. How this is provided is detailed in the Gwent Archives [Access Policy](#), and how this access will be sustained for future generations is detailed in this Collections Care and Conservation Policy.

Policy Aims

This document sets out the Collections Care and Conservation Policy for Gwent Archives and states the principles that guide the preservation activities of the service. It presents clearly the aim of Gwent Archives to

- promote the use of records whilst ensuring safe storage, handling, substitution of original material and remedial conservation
- ensure that conservation, preservation and collections care activities are an integral part of all activities
- Follow relevant national standards and best practice, and a professional code of ethics, in all aspects of collections care and conservation
- Adopt a risk management approach, and assess new deposits at the time of accessioning to identify priorities for conservation

Authorities

Gwent Archives is an Accredited Archive Service, and has a statutory duty to preserve for future generations the unique records in its care under the following legislation:

- Public Records Act 1958 and 1967
- Local Government Act 1962 and 1972
- Local Government (Wales) Act 1994
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Law of Property Act, 1922
- Tithe Act, 1936

Definitions

Preservation is the passive protection of archives in which no physical or chemical treatment is used.

Conservation involves the protection of archives by minimal physical and chemical treatments designed to resist further deterioration and make material available for use.

Collections Care activities are the physical preventive care measures taken to prevent damage and/or delay the natural deterioration of a cultural heritage collection.

Roles and Responsibilities

Whilst the protection of the collections is the responsibility of all the staff, our Conservator is responsible for developing, managing and carrying out the collections care, preservation and conservation activities that support the aims of this policy.

- Conservation treatments are undertaken by an appropriately qualified Conservator, with some treatments requiring assistance from trained members of staff. Some preservation tasks, such as repackaging, environmental recording and monitoring, may be undertaken by other staff or volunteers.
- An ongoing contract with Harwell Restoration is in place for support if necessary
- The Buildings Management Team liaise with the building owners (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council) and appointed managers to organise building maintenance and repair and to safeguard the environment and access.

Accommodation

Gwent Archives ensures appropriate and secure accommodation for all its holdings whether they are in storage, being processed or in use. Storage in controlled environments conforms to *EN16893:2018: Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections*. The building is well maintained to ensure that risks to the collection are minimised, and key protection services are regularly tested.

The collections are stored, according to their physical nature and condition, on mobile and static steel shelving and in map cabinets.

Environment

The accommodation environment is closely monitored by the Conservator, and controlled in partnership with the landlords (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - BGCBC).

- Temperature and Relativity Humidity levels are regularly monitored and recorded via a Building Management System, as well as a manual process
- A regular cleaning regime is in place for public spaces as well as staff areas and Strong Rooms
- A quarterly Pest Management Programme is in place.

Light exposure is reduced to a minimum by ensuring the Strong Room lights are turned off when the rooms are not occupied, archival packaging materials are used and UV filters on light fittings and windows where appropriate.

Gwent Archives liaise with BGCBC to make adjustments to the environmental controls in real time if necessary and to ensure maintenance of the building, prioritising issues that may impact the stability of the environment.

Security

Gwent Archives will provide a secure environment for the storage and use of the archive collections:

- Rooms are accessible only by 'fobs' with designated security access approved by the County Archivist
- External security is provided by a CCTV surveillance system as well as intruder-alarmed doors
- A full call out procedure is in place in the case of unauthorised access outside of designated hours
- Gwent Archives belongs to the Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland) Archives Card scheme, all users of the collections sign up to this scheme
- Access to the collections is provided in a secure, staff invigilated room

Packaging and storage

- All new accessions are checked, in a designated area, to
 - assess their physical condition
 - ensure that mould and/or pests are not introduced into other areas of the building

- ensure that hazardous material is not present
Appropriate preventative treatment, including cleaning, is provided.
- Collections are packaged in appropriate archive-standard packaging prior to transfer to the secure storage areas where possible, and items requiring isolation or specialist packaging are assessed by the Conservator.
- Contaminated archive material, which has the potential to harm or infect other collections, is either placed in isolation or offsite (Harwell Restoration Ltd.) until treated appropriately.
- There is a legacy of collections not prepared to current standards, and an ongoing programme of cleaning and repackaging is in place to address this

Emergency Preparedness Planning

Gwent Archive maintains an Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP), which is reviewed and updated annually to ensure that in a disaster situation the archive holdings have the best possible chance of survival with minimal damage. Staff receive training EPP training annually.

Handling

All new members of staff are trained in document handling and damage awareness, as well as preservation practises such as secondary packaging and environmental monitoring. Existing staff receive appropriate refresher training on document handling, damage awareness and preservation practises annually.

All volunteers receive document handling training and if appropriate damage awareness and preservation practices training.

Preservation equipment - including book rests, weights, polyester film and protective sleeves - is available for researchers accessing the collections, and staff monitor and advise on correct use and handling.

Access

Access to the collections is provided onsite at Gwent Archives, through our remote enquiry and digitisation service and online via third party websites and is described in more detail in our Access Policy.

It is recognised that use introduces risk to the collections, and a number of mitigations are in place to reduce this risk:

- Detailed descriptions of the collections are provided to avoid unnecessary or incorrect requests and use of records
- Public access to original documents is provided in the controlled conditions of an invigilated room in accordance with the Research Room Rules
- Surrogates are made of high-use items, such as parish registers and electoral registers and use of surrogates is advised in preference to the original
- Document use is recorded and assessed regularly to inform conservation needs, planning for digitisation and other surrogacy provision
- Uncatalogued material is available only with 10 working days' notice so that the condition and access restrictions can be checked in advance
- Records may be withdrawn from public access if their physical condition places them at risk from handling.

Reprographics

In the Research Room, copies of original documents can be made by self-service photography using the customer's own camera providing the document is in good condition, that copyright legislation permits the taking of copies and that the depositor has agreed to copies being taken.

Gwent Archives provides an in-house digitisation service for customers, enquirers and for its own preservation needs and creating surrogate copies. All copying using digital processes conforms to appropriate standards and is undertaken by trained staff.

Exhibition

Gwent Archives encourages the use of high-quality copies for both in-house and external displays. Archival documents selected for internal displays will be inspected by the conservator beforehand and monitored for degradation. In the case of depositors withdrawing their own documents a condition report will be undertaken prior to withdrawal and advice provided on handling, display and storage / security. These will be processed in line with the Temporary Withdrawal Procedures.

Conservation

Conservation work at Gwent Archives is carried out by a core-funded, professionally qualified, Conservator with support from the rest of the team and volunteers where

appropriate. National Standards and best practice guidance are used in the work, including:

- BS4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections.
- European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations Code of Ethics 2002
- Archives & Records Association Best Practice Guideline Preservation and Conservation 2014

New developments are regularly identified, researched and, where suitable, incorporated into established practices.

Conservation requirements are considered as part of the cataloguing process, when producing materials for use and through staff knowledge of the collections. A system of prioritisation is in place, on consideration of:

- Demand for access/Urgency
- Physical condition
- Complexity
- Treatment time
- Status of deposit

When repairing a document, we endeavour to retain as much of the original as possible, whilst ensuring that long-term stability and accessibility are maintained. All treatments are recorded on our Collection Management System (CMS) and a work programme is in place to upload all previous paper and electronic conservation records onto the CMS.

Funding

Conservation activities are core funded, but to further support conservation work suitable projects are identified for funding applications and staff proactively seek opportunities for funded project work. Conservation needs are also identified when developing projects for cataloguing and outreach and built into applications.

Related Policies and Plans

The policy relates to the preservation of physical collections (archive and library), a separate policy is in place for the preservation of digital archives, and should be viewed in conjunction with the following [policies](#) and plans:

- Annual Service Plan

- Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Guidelines for Handling, Copying and Packaging
- Digital Preservation Policy
- Access Policy

and other relevant documents.

Review

This policy was approved by Gwent Archives Joint Committee in September 2022. It will be reviewed in September 2025 or sooner if circumstances dictate.