

## Collections Information Policy

### 2025-2030



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# 1.0 Introduction

Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service's (WAAS) priority is to ensure the proper management of Worcestershire's heritage for current and future generations. We protect, preserve, manage, record, interpret, share and promote the history and historic environment of Worcestershire. We help the modern county of Worcestershire to achieve its priorities as identified in the Corporate Plan; Open for Business, Promoting Health and Well Being, Protecting the Environment, Supporting Children and Families. We are developing a sustainable model for the continuance and growth of the Archive and Archaeology Service in the current financial climate. This policy should be viewed in conjunction with our other policies and plans.

# 2.0 Aims

As part of WAAS's responsibility for preserving, managing, interpreting and sharing the historic record of Worcestershire, it must ensure that adequate and appropriate information about the archival collections in its care is collected, recorded and made available. WAAS aims to make collections as discoverable and accessible as possible, by transmitting collections information to our stakeholders using a variety of methods, including electronically through an online catalogue and finding aids.

This Policy defines the information that WAAS will gather and provide about archival collections. It also outlines the history of collections information and cataloguing with the Service and describes the current

cataloguing systems and professional standards used. The Policy is supported by a *Collections Information Plan*, which outlines the objectives through which we will achieve the aims of this policy.

WAAS acknowledges that over the past several decades it has accumulated a substantial backlog of uncatalogued collections, a large proportion of which are completely unlisted. Cataloguing backlogs represent a significant barrier to access, with the result that stakeholders may be unaware of the existence of relevant collections and/or may experience difficulties locating relevant information within an unprocessed collection. There are also implications for the Service's ability to comply with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation, and more generally means that depositors are not being provided with the best possible service. This Policy outlines how this state of affairs has arisen and states the Service's intention to reduce this backlog, while the accompanying *Collections Information Plan* lays out the specific steps necessary to achieve this aim.

WAAS will ensure that the information gathered and provided about collections enables it to fulfil its responsibilities under Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation. WAAS will prioritise collections of Public Records and local authority records in line with the UK government's transition to the 20-year rule.

WAAS will prioritise the cataloguing of previously-identified and emerging collections of particular heritage significance and align its cataloguing priorities to the acquisition priorities identified in the *Collection Development Plan*.

WAAS will take steps to record the information required to ensure digital materials are preserved and can be retrieved and used.

WAAS will continue to ensure that all Collections Information procedures and activities are sustainably resourced and aims to review and streamline all of its Collections Information procedures in order to ensure that they are necessary and as efficient as possible.

It is intended that the policy and plan function as live, working documents which will be reviewed regularly.

### **3.0 Recording collections Information**

WAAS captures information about collections at various points during the 'life' of a collection, from the point of deposit through to cataloguing and subsequently.

This Policy covers information gathered:

- at point of deposit and accessioning
- during cataloguing (including accruals) and indexing
- through location and movement control
- about demand, usage and disposal

- about physical condition, preservation and conservation activities

This information is recorded and maintained in a variety of places and formats. These include but are not limited to:

- Accessions Register (part paper, part electronic)
- Accession forms
- CALM Collections Management Software
- Backlog Cataloguing Control Spreadsheet, which records ownership and monitors the progress of each collection during accessioning and cataloguing
- Correspondence files (partly paper, partly electronic) for our depositors, which may be used to augment the information found in accessions and catalogue records.
- Other finding aids, including handlists and specific indexes, many of which have been and continue to be made available on the Service's website
- Marking and labelling of objects
- Locations spreadsheet
- Document request slips
- Disposals database
- Digital asset register

## 4.0 Point of Deposit and Accessioning

In the first few decades of the Service's history, deposits were not allocated a unique accession number and depositors were not sent a receipt until the collection was catalogued. After a number of incidents of deposits on loan being withdrawn after resources had been used on cataloguing and preserving the records, it was felt necessary to ensure that clear written agreements regarding the terms of deposit were in place.

Since 1991 the Service has maintained an Accession Register, a *Terms of Deposit Policy* and accession forms establishing and recording the legal status of collections, including ownership, access legislation and intellectual property rights. One copy of the accession form is returned to the depositor as a receipt, and another is retained permanently by WAAS, along with all other documentation, as evidence of title.

The current accession form captures a number of details, including:

- Contact details of the depositor
- Brief description of items being donated/deposited, including extent and covering dates
- Custodial/Administrative history
- Any depositor-imposed restrictions or closure periods
- Authority to dispose



Depositors are encouraged to prepare box/contents lists but are not required to do so. Copies of any lists provided are retained and where possible, entered into our cataloguing system (currently CALM).

Information about the physical condition of collections is also recorded at point of deposit and during accessioning.

Separate documentation and procedures have been put in place to cover the accessioning and processing of digital material. A digital asset register is used to record digital material and depositors of new digital material are asked in writing as part of the accessioning process to provide metadata if possible and confirm that they are happy for their deposit to be copied and migrated for preservation purposes.

The accession information forms the basis of the catalogue record when the accessions information is entered into our cataloguing system (currently CALM).

WAAS participates in The National Archives' annual Accessions to Repositories Survey to enable up-to-date information to appear on the National Register of Archives.

## **5.0 Cataloguing (including Accruals) and Indexing**

Cataloguing the collections in WAAS's care is essential for their effective management. All cataloguing since 2004 has been undertaken using

cataloguing software (currently CALM), supported by an in-house General Manual for Cataloguing in CALM. The Service uses the following standards:

- The mandatory elements of International Council on Archives, General International Standard of Archival Description [ISAD(G)]
- International Council on Archives, International Standard Archival Authority for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families [ISAAR(CPF)]
- National Council on Archives, Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names [NCA Rules].

Prior to the adoption of these standards, the original method of cataloguing was based on an in-house standard template using a set of agreed precedents to ensure cataloguers covered the essential information required. Some very large collections had only rough summary lists. The then County Archivist believed that a system of initial inventorying in lesser detail made material available more quickly. The intention was to revisit the collections later and produce detailed catalogues. The sheer weight of collections coming in, especially at the time of various local government reorganisations, meant this never happened.

## **5.1 Accruals**

Accruals to existing collections are catalogued separately, but linked to previous deposits from the same source through their finding numbers,

hierarchical arrangement in they cataloguing system and cross-referencing within the catalogue entries.

A finite number of collections for which we receive regular accruals are treated as *continuations*, i.e. records which were accessioned when first deposited and to which subsequent records accrued without being separately accessioned. A handlist of these collections is available.

## **5.2 Cataloguing Prioritisation and User Demand**

An in-house prioritisation scheme enables us to identify priorities within uncatalogued material to target cataloguing time at selected collections and provide a rationale for decisions. Collections are scored according to their ownership status, Freedom of Information and Data Protection considerations, anticipated demand and potential usage, physical condition, size and complexity. The scoring matrices for each collection are retained on a searchable spreadsheet.

## **5.3 Staff Involvement in Cataloguing**

All Archive staff may be involved in the creation or editing of collections information such as accessioning, cataloguing new deposits, retroconversion of legacy paper catalogues and catalogue amendment and enhancement. Archive assistants are involved in cataloguing where practical, particularly in regard to continuations. Cataloguing activity is monitored by Senior Archivist (Collections). Small or single items for

cataloguing are identified at the point of accession and stored on a spreadsheet so that these can be processed quickly.

Guidance has been developed to assist staff with consistency of approach in the cataloguing process.

## **5.4 Indexing (including Authority Indexing)**

Prior to cataloguing in CALM, collections were indexed manually, using a hand-written slip index system. Originally the slip index was used predominantly by members of staff, who would use it to provide reference services, but it eventually was made available to members of the public to search themselves. Deposits catalogued in CALM are not indexed in this way, as the system automatically indexes terms entered into it and allows users to search by keyword.

## **5.5 Online Catalogue and Finding Aids**

The Service has had a CalmView catalogue available via its website since 2011. This was upgraded to V.5 in 2022. CalmView currently only contains a proportion of the holdings catalogued in CALM and generally speaking does not include our catalogues available on Discovery.

WAAS began the process of retro-converting its old paper-based catalogues to CALM in 2004. Alongside this, information about long-standing depositors (including ownership and intellectual property rights) was input into the depositor database within CALM, and where possible

updated and corrected. This work will be continued as part of a 2 year legacy paper catalogue retroconversion project. Some catalogue entries are also now being linked to Preservica to provide access to digital assets (surrogates or born digital) .

WAAS maintains a variety of handlists and indexes to specific collections both on site and on its website. These are continually updated and improved. The Service intends to publish more of these on our Explore the Past website as they become available. The majority of WAAS's handlists and indexes are developed through the work of volunteers and members of staff. WAAS is also increasingly importing work done by volunteers on spreadsheets into CALM in order to enhance collection level entries.

## **6.0 Restrictions and Closure Periods**

WAAS's collections include records subject to certain access restrictions or periods during which the records are closed. These may be determined by Data Protection legislation, advice and guidance from The National Archives and the Information Commissioner's Office, or be imposed by the depositor. Information Access Officers of County Council's Corporate Information governance Team (CIGT) also offer guidance and advice. The Service has maintained a list of restrictions and closure periods since 2004 for use by reference and cataloguing staff. It is WAAS's policy to mark catalogue entries, the locations database and archival packaging with these restrictions and to make users aware of

restrictions and their rationale. Archive staff follow documented procedures when advising users of the steps necessary to gain access to particular classes of restricted records.

## **7.0 Physical Condition, Preservation and Conservation**

The physical condition of collections is initially assessed at the point of deposit and during accessioning. This information is entered into CALM and taken into account when the collection is prioritised for cataloguing.

Preservation and conservation activities undertaken on archival material are recorded in CALM.

For born digital deposits, metadata will be requested from the depositor in line with provided guidance at point of accession, evidencing authenticity, reliability and integrity of data. This is then preserved alongside the digital content within the digital preservation system.

## **8.0 Locations and Movement Control, including Loans**

WAAS aims to maintain up to date information on the locations of collections in its care. It uses a combination of paper document requisition slips containing the details of the documents and the user, a

spreadsheet documenting the shelf location of each parcel, CALM software, and clear marking and labelling on the objects themselves.

WAAS will ensure that information about mislaid or withdrawn records is recorded in all copies of catalogues and that 'dummy cards' are placed on shelves in the place of missing records. A central register of mislaid records is also maintained. The locations database is also annotated accordingly.

Depositors wishing to remove archival material temporarily for example for use in exhibitions, fill in a designated document requisition form, sign a withdrawal letter and concede to a condition report. The condition is reviewed upon the return of items. Depositors are also supplied with information about the correct handling and exhibition of documents, in accordance with the *Preservation and Conservation Policy*. A return date is negotiated, and reminders will be sent to parties in possession of unreturned archival material.

Separate procedures, including timed retrieval for charging purposes where appropriate, cover certain classes of documents, including adoption files, Magistrates Court and Coroners records.

## **9.0 Disposals and Withdrawals**

At the point of deposit, WAAS captures depositors' permissions to destroy or transfer to another repository any material that we are unable to keep.

These permissions are reconfirmed prior to disposal. WAAS maintains a database of all disposal decisions, including their rationale.

WAAS makes use of retention and disposal schedules where appropriate, both for its own disposal decisions and when advising depositors about records recommended for permanent preservation. These schedules include those produced by the County Council, Archives and Records Association, Church of England, and other organisations. WAAS has developed in-house retention guides for particular organisations and classes of records and aims to produce additional guides in the future. WAAS also works closely with the Worcestershire County Council Corporate Information and Governance Team regarding the preservation and cataloguing of Council records transferred to the Archive Service.

Depositors are made aware at the point of deposit that if a collection on loan is withdrawn before twenty years have elapsed, a charge may be made to cover the Council's expenditure on cataloguing, preserving and conserving the records.

## **10.0 Funding for Cataloguing Activities**

For a number of years WAAS has applied for grants and funding in order to resource significant cataloguing projects. More recently funding has been awarded from various bodies to catalogue collections including hospital and health records, Public records, and archives from Bromsgrove Court Leet and Ombersley Conservation Trust.



This mode of resourcing cataloguing activity is likely to become increasingly significant as WAAS adjusts to the changing financial climate.

## **11.0 Protecting Collections Information**

WAAS seeks to maintain the security of its collections information to avoid loss or compromise as part of its duty of care to depositors and donors. CALM is backed up daily and electronic files relating to depositor information are stored on the Council U drive and therefore are subject to the Council's overall data, backup, security and disaster recovery routines.

Paper depositor files are held in lockable file cabinets in staff areas and old hard copy accession registers are stored in our strongrooms.

## **12.0 References**

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other policies and plans.

## **13.0 Review**

This policy was reviewed in January 2025 and will be reviewed again in January 2030 or sooner if circumstances dictate.

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