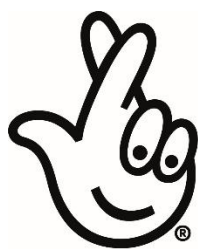


Cheshire's archives: a story shared - Cheshire Archives

Conservation Plan (Collections)

Compiled by Kevin Bolton



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Executive summary

(i) Introduction

This Conservation Plan (Collections) has been commissioned by Cheshire Archives and Local Studies to support their Round 2 National Lottery Heritage Fund bid for the 'Cheshire's archives: a story shared' project. It was compiled by Kevinjbolton Ltd in partnership with the staff. It sets out what is currently understood about the collections - their significance, the issues and risks currently facing them, and how they will be managed and maintained in the long term. This plan focuses on archives, local studies and special collections.

(ii) Understanding the collections

Cheshire Archives and Local Studies collects material which can contribute to a better understanding of the history and development of the county of Cheshire, and their communities. The archives collections include families and estate collections; church and diocese records; official/public records; business records; and records of societies, clubs and associations. The Local Studies collections consist of books, pamphlets, printed maps, trade directories and other material relating to Cheshire. The main local studies collection is held at Cheshire Record Office, Duke Street, but many of Cheshire's libraries also hold material.

The extent of the collections in 2020 is 1090 cubic metres - approximately half the collections are stored at Cheshire Record Office and half are held in an out-store (Deepstore). The most common format is paper, with significant quantities of parchment material dating from the 12th century onwards. Many archive collections include photographs, and there is a large and dedicated local studies photographic collection. The service holds Archive Service Accreditation (since 2015).

(iii) Significance of the collections

Dr. Alan Crosby has described the history of Cheshire as "rich and complex" and the same can be said of the collections held by Cheshire Archives and Local Studies. The service holds superb medieval documents, civil war archives, reformation period diocesan collections, agricultural archives, internationally important industrial records, archives of world engineering firsts, unique new towns, LGBTQ+ activism and literary greats. In recent years, the service has worked with partners such as Cheshire, Halton & Warrington Race & Equality Centre and Body Positive to resolve collecting gaps.

(iv) Issues and vulnerabilities

The following table summarises the current strengths, weaknesses/risks and project opportunities for conservation and collections management at the service, with links to other project plans and budgets indicated in square brackets.

	Strengths	Weaknesses/risks	Project opportunities
Storage and security	Good quality out-store.	Poor quality storage at Duke Street. Local studies collections not stored in secure rooms. Lack of CCTV for security.	New storage for Duke Street collections at the history centres. [Design Response]
Workspaces and equipment	-	Cramped conditions for working on collections. No spaces for quarantine, acclimatisation or search room holding. Poor environmental conditions in conservation.	New conservation and reprographic workspaces at the Chester history centre. New equipment. [Design Response]
Condition and packaging	Collections in good condition generally and well packaged.	Some parts of the collection (25%), particularly outsize, are not packaged. Some boxes are over filled. Local studies packaging could be improved.	In preparation for the move of the collections, repackaging of outsize, local studies and high-risk collections will be carried out. Volunteers will support this programme. [Activity Plan: V2]
Policies, procedures and training	Strong set of policies, procedures and training.	Some policies are due for review and do not cover collections held in libraries. They do not cover display/exhibition. There is a demand for training from library staff.	A new Collections Care & Conservation Policy and Disaster Plan. There will also be a handling/ conservation training programme for staff, volunteers, community archives/library staff. [Activity Plan: TR4]
Catalogues and digitisation	Archive collections are well catalogued and there has been a strong digitisation programme.	The current catalogue and digital offer a poor user experience and are a barrier to access. Some catalogues could do with improving, especially for local studies.	Create a new interface and gateway with collection information and presenting information from the collections. [Interpretation Plan: OPUS] This includes the creation of a Collections Information Improvement Officer. [Activity Plan: S2; C1]
Locations	Good archives locations database. Barcoding of boxes/containers at the out-	Locations database can be difficult to amend. Some locations are held on different systems (e.g., local studies).	Capture accurate locations for all collections. Explore the feasibility of barcoding all boxes/containers.

	store. Good information about size of collections.	No barcoding of boxes/containers at Duke Street.	
Collecting gaps	In recent years, the archive has worked successfully partners to resolve collecting gaps.	There are gaps in the collections e.g., post 1950s Cheshire and business records.	Projects and activities delivered will help build relationships with groups and identify/develop collections. [Activity Plan: O1]

(v) Future management

Policies

The Collections Care and Conservation Policy has been updated as part of this project and explains how the service will manage the main risks and threats to the survival and accessibility of its collections. A new Disaster Control Plan will also be required for the history centres. Minor revisions to other policies may be required.

Design specification

In terms of collections care and conservation, the design of the history centres should conform to the following standards:

- Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collection (BS EN 16893:2018).
- Conservation and care of archive and library collections (BS 4971:2017). Particularly the section on environmental conditions (Section 5.1).

In addition, the design of any display cases for collections should conform to *Conservation of cultural heritage. Guidelines for design of showcases for exhibition and preservation of objects. General requirements* (BS EN 15999-1:2014).

Action plan

There are three workstreams relating to conservation and collections care which will be delivered as part of the project:

- Workstream 1 – Space planning, move and collections information.
- Workstream 2 – Policies, procedures, training, and support to groups/libraries.
- Workstream 3 - New storage and conservation/collection spaces at the history centres.

Workstream	1. Space planning, move and collections information
<p>Background and context</p> <p>The Cheshire's archives: a story shared project will require the service to move collections from their current site at Duke Street to the new history centres at Chester and Crewe. Some of the collections may require packaging prior to the move. Barcoding and improving some elements of collections information (e.g. locations, catalogues) could make the move easier and help inventory control in the future. Accurate information about the size of the collections will also be required to enable the move and space planning at the new history centres.</p> <p>The collections at the out-store will remain there. However, there is still some outstanding work that is require at the out-store in terms of packaging and barcoding.</p>	
<p>Aims and objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure collections can be moved or placed in transit without damage being caused to them. • Ensure there is an audit trail for the collections move and any transits and that they are not lost. • Ensure collections can be moved or transported between their three locations easily in the future – in terms of preservation and audit trails. • Ensure there is accurate information about the size of collections to inform the move and space planning and storage at the new history centres. 	
<p>Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the physical size and formats of the collection including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Surveying the formats of photographic collections. ○ Updating the current storage spreadsheet position, including all outsize. ○ Identifying where the collections are going to be stored or located (Crewe, Chester, Deepstore). • Prepare collections for moving safely and securely including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Packaging and barcoding current Deepstore collections. ○ Moving or disposing of the remaining Ellesmere Port collections. ○ Scoping a project for barcoding and recording locations. ○ Identify collections/formats that are packaging priorities. ○ Packaging collections that can fit into standard boxes. ○ Repackaging overfilled boxes. • Moving the collections including: 	

- Creating a brief for the removal company and method statements.
- Moving the collections.
- Review collections information plan and collections processing plan.

Interdependencies with other workstreams and projects

- Work with architects to design storage, security and shelving for paper, parchment and local studies collections that confirms to BS EN 16893:2018 and BS 4971:2017. The storage position document will need to inform this (Workstream 3).
- Staff and volunteers undertaking repacking, locations or barcoding work will require training (Workstream 2).
- The Interpretation Plan will deliver a seamless search of disparate collections information and digital assets with a generous search interface that will allow subjective and personalised discovery (OPUS). This has been tested at development stage. To make this work CALS will need to deliver more and improved collections information, indexing and metadata. Catalogue improvements will be planned and carried out and this will include: additional cataloguing, geolocating, metadata creation and catalogue improvements. A Collections Information Improvement Officer will be created to help deliver this. See the Interpretation Plan and Activity Plan for more detail.

Risks

- Collections are damaged or lost during the move or transit between sites.
- Inaccurate space information means scope of move or new storage is not accurate.
- Lack of support or resource from other Council department e.g. Corporate ICT.
- Lack of CALS resource (e.g. staff) to complete the tasks in this workstream – particularly for the barcoding.

Resource requirements

- CALS staff resource to carry out tasks/work.
- CALS volunteer resource to assist with repackaging.
- Corporate ICT resource to possibly amend locations database.
- Budget for repackaging materials and barcodes.
- Budget for the move of the collections.

Workstream	2. Policies, procedures, training, and support to groups/libraries.
<p>Background and context</p> <p>The Cheshire's archives: a story shared project will require a new Collection Care and Conservation Policy which covers the new history centres, including exhibitions. A new Disaster Control Plan will also be required. To help implement these new policies, staff and volunteers will require training in collections care and conservation. In addition, training and support will be provided to community groups and libraries who hold archives and special collections.</p>	
<p>Aims and objectives</p> <p>Reduce the preservation and security risks to the collections held at the history centres and across the County by ensuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are clear policies and procedures in collections care and conservation at CALS. • CALS staff and volunteers are well trained in collections care and conservation. • Community groups and libraries have the skills and support to care for collections. 	
<p>Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review policies annually and adopt new policies/procedures for history centres. • Deliver training for staff, volunteers, community archives and libraries. including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Online handling training. ○ Packaging training ○ Building and collection spaces inductions. ○ Emergency planning training. ○ Fire Marshall training. ○ Exhibition display methods. • Visits to local libraries to view special collections. 	
<p>Interdependencies with other workstreams and projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Collections Care and Conservation Policy should inform the design of the storage and collection areas in the new history centres (Workstream 3). • The training will be incorporated into the Training Plan in the Activity Plan. • The training for community archives and library staff is incorporated in the Activity Plan. Further detail can be found here. 	

Risks

- Collections are damaged or lost due to lack of staff and volunteer awareness or policies/procedures not being implemented in practice.
- Health and safety risks to staff and volunteers due to lack of staff and volunteer awareness or policies/procedures not being implemented in practice.
- Lack of CALS resource (e.g. staff) to develop or deliver training.

Resource requirements

- CALS staff resource to carry out tasks/work.
- CALS volunteer and staff resource to attend training.
- Budget for training and e-learning platform.
- Budget for Harwell priority user subscription.

Workstream	3. New storage and conservation/collection spaces at the history centres
<p>Background and context</p> <p>The new history centres will need to be designed so that they confirm to BS EN 16893:2018, BS 4971:2017 and other standards. This is particularly important for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building security. • Fire prevention and suppression. • Environmental conditions. • Collections storage. • Shelving design. • Searchroom and other spaces where collections are used (e.g. conservation studio, reprographics and staff/volunteer spaces) • Exhibition and display cases. <p>Good design will reduce the preservation and security risks to the collections. CALS staff will need to work with the architects and interpretation designers to develop the designs.</p>	
<p>Aims and objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the collections storage and spaces in the new history centres will safeguard the collections. • Ensure the exhibition spaces and cases in the new history centres will not presents risks to the preservation and security of the collections. • Ensure the collection storage and spaces in the new history centres will make it easier to undertake conservation, collections care and processing tasks. 	
<p>Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire risk assessment to inform approach to fire detection and protection. • Security risk assessment to inform security strategy, including CCTV. • Detailed design of the conservation studio space and equipment. • Detailed design of other spaces e.g. search room, reprographics, quarantine and processing. • Detailed design of the strong rooms • Detailed shelving design. • Identification and procurement of new equipment required. • Detailed design of exhibition cases and spaces. 	

Interdependencies with other workstreams and projects

- The Collections Care and Conservation Policy (Workstream 2) should inform the design of the storage and collection spaces in the new history centres.
- The storage position document (Workstream 1) will need to inform the design of the shelving.

Risks

- Building design does not meet British standards and presents risks to the preservation and security of the collections.
- Inaccurate space information means design of new storage is not accurate.
- Suitable conservation/collections equipment is not in the project scope.

Resource requirements

- CALS staff resource to carry out tasks/work.
- Capital budget includes architectural design and building costs.