



Archives and Research Collections

Collections Care and Conservation Policy: Archives and Rare Books

This policy sets out how we care for collections at the Borthwick Institute for Archives (Borthwick) and in the University of York Rare Books collection.

1. Policy

1.1 Our mission is to support and expand the University of York's cultural endeavour and contribute to human understanding through collecting archives, rare books and artworks; preserving them; and making them widely available for research to all people, now and in the future.

1.2 We are committed to preservation for access. We preserve archives and rare books so that they can be used by present and future generations.

1.3 We minimise the risk of damage or deterioration to the archives and rare books in our care through preservation and conservation.

1.4 We apply recognised standards for the preservation and conservation of the archives and rare books in our custody. The principal standards, best practice guidelines and tools we use are given in [Standards and Guidelines Used at the Borthwick](#).

1.5 We apply cost effective preservation and conservation measures for maximum benefit to the archives and rare books. We are committed to a programme of preservation and conservation work, carried out in accordance with agreed priorities and available resources, drawn from both internal and external funds, as set out in the preservation plan.

Risk assessment and management

1.6 We manage risks to the archives and rare books through the provision of appropriately qualified staff, secure, environmentally-controlled storage, searchroom and exhibition facilities, environmental monitoring, preservation equipment, training and guidance in document handling, surrogates, and a secure and standards-compliant digital archiving facility. These systems are covered by the regularly reviewed Borthwick Disaster Control Plan and the Library, Archives and Learning Services and University's business continuity planning measures.

1.7 Qualified conservators at the Borthwick provide professional management of our preventive and remedial conservation activities for archives and rare books. Conservation staff work to the Institute of Conservation (ICON) Professional Standards and Judgement and Ethics (June 2020), ICON Ethical Guidance (June 2020) and the ICON code of conduct (2014). They strive to keep abreast of current developments in their field and promote an awareness and understanding of the Borthwick's conservation work amongst our staff, users, volunteers and the wider public.

1.8 We assess the needs of the archives and rare books and identify any risks of deterioration through surveys and a high level technology watch. The results of these activities inform our preservation and conservation priorities.

1.9 Prioritisation for remedial conservation work and treatment decisions is driven by preservation and conservation survey work, user demand, physical condition, significance, and anticipated use, as assessed by the Borthwick's Collections Development Group.

Acquisition of archives

1.10 Where facilities for the preservation of particular formats of archives are not available in the Borthwick at the point of acquisition of those archives, the Borthwick aims to secure, provide or direct depositors to such facilities either onsite or elsewhere (for example through deposit of archives in a specialist repository).

Security

1.11 We store all the archives and rare books in our care securely. We protect the archives and rare books against environmental threats, theft, vandalism, deliberate or accidental damage, and mishandling.

Buildings and Storage

1.12 We ensure that our building provides the appropriate conditions for the storage, consultation and exhibition of the archives and rare books in our care following recognised standards and through regular maintenance schedules.

Housekeeping

1.13 All areas are kept clean to minimise threats from dust, pollutants, pests, mould and other agents of deterioration. Good housekeeping practices are routinely implemented by a specially trained team of cleaners and these practices are monitored by cleaning supervisors and archives staff, enabling action to be taken quickly in the event of a threat.

1.14 New accessions are inspected for threats such as damp, mould, pests and dirt and isolated and treated as necessary before being placed in the strongrooms.

Environmental monitoring and control

1.15 We manage the environment in all areas where archives and rare books are stored, consulted and exhibited using a building management system and digital loggers, and take appropriate action if the temperature, relative humidity or light levels fall outside the ranges specified in the recognised standards.

Packaging

1.16 We package the physical archives in our care in suitable materials as a first defence against agents of deterioration. Packaging for rare books is determined by packaging surveys carried out by the Rare Books Librarian and the conservators.

Disaster recovery and continuity

1.17 In the event of a disaster we will implement our Disaster Control Plan.

Access

1.18 Public access to physical archives and rare books in their original format takes place under the controlled conditions of an invigilated searchroom in accordance with our searchroom regulations.

1.19 We restrict or mediate access to fragile material as necessary for its preservation. Material may be declared unfit for public access by an archivist or conservator until such time as it has been treated by a conservator, or a surrogate copy has been created. The reasons for our decision will be clearly explained to the researcher and we will prioritise the treatment or digitisation of unfit material in a timescale agreed with the researcher.

1.20 We promote good handling practices through the provision of preservation equipment, verbal advice, written guidance, social media, handling training, and surrogates.

1.21 In some cases we may make surrogate copies of documents to minimise handling of the originals in the interest of their long-term preservation. Where surrogates are available, access to physical archives and rare books in their original format is only granted where researchers can demonstrate that the surrogate is not an adequate substitute. Dissemination copies of born digital material are created as surrogates for access in order to protect the authenticity and integrity of the born-digital originals and preservation copies, to which access will not be permitted.

1.22 Reproductions of documents and rare books to facilitate access, either at the request of individual researchers or as part of a larger project, are only made where we can minimise the risk of damage to documents as a result of the copying process.

Exhibitions and loans

1.23 Exhibitions in the Borthwick are mounted in secure display cases in accordance with the recognised standards. Original records and rare books items are displayed for no longer than four months and facsimiles are used where appropriate. Environmental conditions in all exhibition areas are monitored, light sources are UV filtered, and the areas are monitored by CCTV.

1.24 We supply material for exhibitions to owners, other archive repositories, museums, libraries or galleries on completion of the appropriate documentation. We reserve the right to decline exhibition requests for material deemed at risk by qualified conservation staff, where the host organisation's facilities cannot be shown to meet the recognised standards, or appropriate insurance is not available.

1.25 We keep permanent records of withdrawals of records and rare books, whether for exhibitions or other reasons.

Principles of conservation of physical objects

1.26 We minimise the need for remedial conservation by actively promoting and undertaking preventive measures wherever possible.

1.27 We employ conservation treatments that respect the historical and material authenticity of the original records, apply minimal intervention and employ reversible methods wherever possible and appropriate, use repair materials to the recognised conservation grade, and that are fully documented, guided by the recognised standard, and carried out in accordance with health and safety requirements and risk assessments.

2. Scope

2.1 The policy applies to all the collections in the care or custody of the Borthwick

Institute for Archives and the University Rare Books Library.

2.2 Collection items within the University of York Art Collection are managed through a separate Art Collections Management Policy, which is being developed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and our Art Committee.

2.3 Collections at York Minster Library are managed through the [York Minster Collections Development Policy](#), owned by the Chapter of York.

3. Oversight

3.1 Overall responsibility for preservation and conservation is with the Keeper of Archives and Special Collections.

3.2 The Archives and Research Collections Leadership Team is responsible for overseeing policy implementation.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Preservation is the shared responsibility of all Archives and Research Collections staff, volunteers and users.

4.2 The Conservation and Preservation Team is responsible for coordinating preservation activities.

4.3 Archive conservators carry out conservation work on our archives and rare books collections, and provide professional preservation and conservation advice and support.

4.4 Digital archiving and preservation activities are managed and coordinated by the Digital Preservation Archivist.

5. Policy implementation documents

5.1 This document is supported by the following policies and implementation documents:

- Collections care and conservation plan
- Preservation and conservation procedures
- Digital Preservation plan
- Digital Preservation handbook
- Digital Preservation Policy
- Web Archiving Policy
- Digital Preservation Guide for Depositors
- Disaster control plan

- Reprographics procedures
- Digitisation policy, plan and procedures
- Access policy, plan and procedures
- Forward plan
- University Library contingency management plan
- University Library business continuity plan
- University of York business continuity plan
- University of York Information Security Policy
- University of York Data Protection Policy

Document history and status

August 2017	Information Services SMT	Approved
December 2020	Borthwick Leadership Team	Light touch revision and expansion of review date to harmonise with other archives policy.
July 2023	Library Archives and Learning Services Leadership Team	Approved

Review cycle 5 years

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