

COLLECTIONS CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY



Mission Statement

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 the public with 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. How this access will be sustained for future generations is detailed in the Gwent Archives 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 in fulfilling its statutory duties. 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.

Preservation is a fundamental responsibility through which Gwent Archives ensures the authenticity and accessibility of the records it holds. Gwent Archives recognises that preservation should be a pervasive function and works to ensure that it remains an integral part of all activities. Without preservation there can be no access.

This policy supports our Mission Statement as set out above and should be seen in conjunction with Gwent Archives' Service Plan, Emergency Preparedness Plan, Guidelines for Handling, Copying and Packaging, and other relevant policy documents.

Authorities

Gwent Archives has a statutory duty to preserve for future generations the unique records in its care under the following legislation:

- Public Records Act 1958;
- Local Government Act 1972;
- Local Government (Wales) Act 1994;
- Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Gwent Archives has adopted the Archive Service Accreditation Standard.

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.

Roles and Responsibilities

All Gwent Archives staff are required to assist in implementing the preservation policy as appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.

The conservator is responsible for managing preservation activities.

Preservation Management

Established work procedures are in place to ensure minimal degradation of records. Constituent aspects will be monitored regularly and analysed to seek improvement.

All new members of staff will be given preservation training and appropriate refresher training will be provided for existing staff. Staff are currently given Document Handling training and Damage Awareness training.

Gwent Archives conforms to relevant standards and best-practice guidelines including:

- 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
- BS4971:2002 - Recommendations for Repair and allied processes for the conservation of documents.

Gwent Archives will review its conservation programme annually.

Acquisition

Gwent Archives' Collections Policy places limits on the types of material collected with regard to the resources of the service to catalogue, preserve and store.

The service seeks to stimulate good practice by depositors of records to ensure that documents chosen for permanent preservation are on good quality material and in appropriate condition when transferred.

All records are checked on arrival to assess their physical condition and to ensure that mould and/or pests are not introduced into the Strong Rooms and other areas of the building.

Accommodation, Security and Environment

Gwent Archives seeks to ensure appropriate and secure accommodation for all its holdings whether they are in storage, being processed or in use. This includes storage in controlled environments conforming to EN16893:2018. Temperature and Relative Humidity Levels within the strong rooms are closely monitored and recorded in order that a stable storage environment can be maintained.

Storage also takes into account the size, condition, intrinsic value and use of each item. All collection items are provided with archival quality secondary packaging; where appropriate custom-made packaging is used.

The service keeps and will regularly update an Emergency Preparedness Plan to ensure that in a disaster situation the archive holdings have the best possible chance of survival with minimal damage.

Gwent Archives maintains a regular cleaning regime for Strong Room areas. Each Strong Room has a deep clean biannually and spot-cleaning is done as and when needed. A Pest Management Programme has been established with quarterly inspections being carried out and recorded.

The building is well maintained to ensure that risks to the collection are minimised. Key protection services are regularly tested.

Access

Wherever possible Gwent Archives will develop record descriptions for the catalogues and detailed index entries that avoid unnecessary or incorrect requests for the production of records.

Public access to original documents will be in the controlled conditions of an invigilated Research Room. Gwent Archives will promote good handling practice by the provision of protective equipment e.g. book rests; polyester film for maps, plans and drawings;

protective sleeves for photographs. Written handling guidelines are provided in the Research Room and staff will advise and monitor public handling of the records.

Records may be withdrawn from public access if their physical condition places them at risk from handling. In special circumstances such records may be viewed under individual supervision. Reader demand for withdrawn material will increase its priority for conservation treatment.

Where a surrogate is available it must be used by readers and staff in preference to the original. Document use is recorded and periodically assessed to inform planning for digitisation and other surrogacy provision.

Copying

Where the condition of original documents is fragile or when frequent actual or anticipated use is liable to put them at risk, surrogates will be provided if possible.

All copies kept by Gwent Archives have preservation value because they:

- Reduce the movement and exposure of archival records;
- May be designated the archival record if the original is lost or damaged;
- May constitute proof of condition and legal ownership

All preservation copying using digital processes will conform to appropriate standards.

Copying of electronic records may be carried out to meet requirements for media refreshment, security, disaster recovery and access.

Restrictions are in place to ensure that copying at user request should not endanger the archival record (see Access Policy).

Conservation

Conservation treatments undertaken accord with nationally recognised and agreed ethical and technical standards including:

- BS4971:2002 Recommendations for the repair and allied processes for the conservation of documents;
- European Confederation of Conservators-Restorer's Organisations (ECCO) Code of Ethics 2002;
- Archives & Records Association Best Practice Guideline Preservation and Conservation (2014).

Technical developments will be regularly assessed and where suitable incorporated into established practices.

Priorities for conservation will be determined using the following criteria:

- Document demand, which is recorded and periodically assessed, and anticipated demand;
- Significance;
- Degree of existing damage and potential future deterioration and degradation;
- Status of deposit.

All conservation treatment will be undertaken with the intention of preserving the maximum degree of evidential value and the minimum impact on the authenticity of the record.

Exhibition

Gwent Archives encourages the use of facsimiles 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, advice on handling, display and storage / security is issued along with *Temporary Withdrawal* forms.

This Policy was approved by the Gwent Archives Joint Committee on 14 June 2019. It will be reviewed in April 2023 or sooner if circumstances dictate.