

Collections Information Policy

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Introduction

Gwent Archives is a regional archives service, working on behalf of the local authorities of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Monmouthshire County Council, Newport City Council and Torfaen County Borough Council. Its priority is the management of Gwent’s documentary heritage, so that it is preserved for current and future generations.

By collecting archival records, Gwent Archives helps provide evidence for the accountability of public institutions, decision-makers and opinion formers thereby helping safeguard the democratic and legal rights of the citizen. Good quality documentation about the collections and procedures for recording information, through accessioning, appraisal, cataloguing and other activities, are fundamental to collections management and access.

Historical Context

Gwent Archives was established in 1938 and many of our collections pre-date modern, standards based, collections information processing and cataloguing. We

aim to produce standards-compliant electronic catalogues, but there is a large backlog of paper-based catalogues and indexes that require updating and uploading to our collections management system. These historic catalogues are handwritten, typed or catalogued electronically via Archivists' Toolkit. These are supplemented with handwritten and typed indexes to the catalogues.

In addition there are legacy collections for which depositor information and agreements are lacking. This is an obstacle to access to the collections, and stakeholders may be unaware that relevant records exist. Lack of collections information also affects the intellectual control held over some archive collections and can hinder decision making. The ability of the Service to comply with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation could also be affected.

Gwent Archives is committed to improving the legacy catalogues and information, and every effort will be taken when converting old finding aids to

- conform to the mandatory elements of General Standard of Archival Description (ISAD(G))
- improve inadequate collections information
- revisit past terminology and descriptive practice for marginalised groups to remove barriers and/or offence for current audiences

A programme of retroconverting legacy finding aids from paper catalogues and Archivist Toolkit forms part of our Collections Information Plan.

Policy Aims

This policy outlines our commitment to collecting and documenting information about our collections and to improving legacy information where possible. It is supported by a Collections Information Plan which outlines the objectives through which we will achieve the aims of this policy. Together the Policy and the Plan assist in decision making.

Point of Deposit and Accessioning

An accessions register is maintained for purchases, donations, deposits and transferred. These are in electronic and paper format and will be transferred to our collections management system as part of our Collections Information Plan. Acquisition forms, correspondence, temporary withdrawal information and other paperwork regarding the deposit are collected into a series of depositor files and are permanently retained. Summary information on deposits is submitted to The National Archives annually and new deposits reported quarterly to the Gwent Archives Joint Committee.

Cataloguing Prioritisation

A prioritisation scheme is in place to assess new deposits and enable the targeting of cataloguing time at priority 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 are recorded on a spreadsheet for permanent retention. There is a large backlog of uncatalogued material that has not been prioritised and this is being addressed through our Collection Development Plan.

Cataloguing and Indexing

Prior to 2022 cataloguing was undertaken using the software Archivists' Toolkit and the mandatory element of the ISAD(G) were used. The resulting catalogues are available on our website in PDF format. This system was introduced in 2009 and catalogues produced before that were typewritten and only available in hardcopy. Paper indexes were produced for Archivist Toolkit and the predecessor catalogues. There is therefore a large backlog of catalogued collections to improve and make more available.

In 2022 we purchased a Collections Management System (Epexio), which will enhance access to the collections information and will be used for all new catalogues. 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]

as well as following current guidance on terminology and descriptive practice for marginalised groups. An in-house Cataloguing Manual describes the processes and practices for collections management.

To increase access to our catalogues Gwent Archives is also committed to contributing catalogues to The National Archives' *Discovery* catalogue and to the *Archives Hub*.

Disposals and withdrawals

Permission to destroy, return or transfer items to a more appropriate repository is captured at the point of deposit and recorded on the Acquisition Form. These permissions are reconfirmed prior to disposal. Actions taken and the rationale for the decisions are recorded in the depositor file and on the Collections Management System.

A procedure is in place for the temporary withdrawal of records by their depositors, upon request to the County Archivist and the agreement of a timescale. Guidance is provided to the depositor on handling, storage and display and a condition report is undertaken by the conservator upon their removal and return.

Depositors are aware at the point of deposit that if a collection on loan is withdrawn a charge may be made to cover expenditure on cataloguing, storing, preserving and conserving the records. This is recorded in our Terms of Acquisition. Items permanently withdrawn will be clearly identified on our catalogue and location spreadsheet, and legacy items not clearly identified are addressed through our Collections Information Plan.

Location and movement control

Gwent Archives aims to have full intellectual and physical control over the records it holds. On arrival the temporary location of any new accession is recorded on a locations spreadsheet and updated with their permanent home.

Any items removed from their location are recorded on document request slips, whether for use by staff or the public. Checks are undertaken at the end of each day to ensure the safe and accurate return of all items.

A process is in place to track any items that have been mislaid and to return them to their permanent location. On the rare occasion that items are 'missing' longer term this will be clearly identified on the catalogue and on the location spreadsheet.

Staffing and funding

Qualified Archivists determine the best intellectual arrangement of each collection by following the archival principals of provenance, and original order. They plan and carry out the cataloguing and also allocate tasks to para-professional staff in accordance with the complexity of the tasks and the skills and experience of the individual. They oversee adherence to professional standards

Cataloguing activity is funded for the most part from the core Gwent Archives budget, but funding has been obtained for cataloguing projects in the past. Gwent Archives will take every opportunity in future to apply for appropriate funding to further enhance our catalogues.

Related Policies and Plans

The Collections Information Policy should be read in conjunction with the following [policies](#) and plans:

- Access Policy
- Archive Collections Policy
- Collections Care and Conservation Policy
- Collections Care and Conservation Plan
- Digital Preservation Policy
- Collections Management Policy
- Collections Development Plan
- Collections Information Plan
- Library Collections Policy

Review

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