



# Durham County Record Office

## Collections Development Policy

### 2021 to 2024

Author	Owner	Approval body
Liz Bregazzi, County Archivist	Liz Bregazzi, County Archivist	Head of Transformation

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**Durham County Record Office**  
**Collections Development Policy**

**1 Purpose**

- 1.1 Our collections development policy exists to explain why Durham County Record Office (DCRO) collects and keeps the archives and publications in its care, and how we support communities to do the same.
- 1.2 Our policy takes into account recommendations of The National Archives for collections development and current government policy on archives (Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century 2009 and Archives Unlocked 2017).
- 1.3 It should be read alongside our other policies, in particular our Collecting Policy, Collections Management Policy and Digital Preservation Policy.

**2 Context**

- 2.1 Durham County Record Office is the statutory local authority archive service for County Durham. We also act under agreement as the archive authority for Darlington Borough Council and as the Durham Diocesan Record Office for Parish Records. DCRO is an Accredited Archive Service and appointed as a place of deposit for public records by The National Archives.

- 2.2 Our mission statement:

Durham County Record Office collects, conserves, secures and makes accessible historical records relating to County Durham and Darlington to enable learning and education, business operations, local accountability, and personal enrichment.

**3 Scope**

- 3.1 This policy applies to all records managed by our service both analogue and digital: Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council corporate records and records offered to us as potential archives by other organisations or individuals.

**4 Policy Principles**

- 4.1 'Archives are the record of the everyday activities of governments, organisations, businesses and individuals. They are central to the record of our national and local stories and are vital in creating cultural heritage and supporting public policy objectives. Their preservation ensures that future generations will be able to learn from the experiences of the past to make decisions about the present and future' (Archives for the 21st century 2009).

- 4.2 Archives take many different forms - handwritten, typed, printed, photographic, digital, audio-visual - and may include media formats that are now redundant.
- 4.3 We preserve archives because of the enduring value of the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator. This important evidential role of archives supports research and the operational efficiency of organisations. What we preserve is unique and therefore irreplaceable.
- 4.4 We undertake the collection, preservation and provision of access to archives following professional principles and ethical guidance.
- 4.5 We deliver an advisory service to support our communities, to help people gather and retain their own collections, and we provide options for the long-term preservation of collections.

## **5 Policy requirements**

### **5.1 Scope, strength and weaknesses of our collections**

- 5.1.1 DCRO holds archives that reflect the life and work of the people of County Durham and Darlington over the past 900 years. They show how people worked, the landscape they lived in, what they wore, what they ate, how they were educated, how they spent their leisure time, what the state of their health was like, their attitudes and beliefs, politics and religions.
- 5.1.2 The archives contain millions of documents and are an unrivalled source of evidence for the historic County Durham.
- 5.1.3 However, we are aware that there are gaps in our collections and that some of our estates, businesses and communities are not well represented. The Gypsy Roma Traveller community is County Durham's largest ethnic minority, and collections include images and official records of sites, but the community has a stronger oral than written tradition. We also face a major challenge in gathering and preserving digital records that quickly become corrupted or inaccessible.
- 5.1.4 Our collections include archives from:
- Durham County Council and its predecessor authorities.
  - Darlington Borough Council and its predecessor authorities.
  - Parish and Town Councils in County Durham and Darlington.
  - Schools and academies in County Durham and Darlington.
  - Coroners, magistrates court, police, health and other bodies creating Public Records (under the Public Records Act 1958).
  - The Durham Light Infantry archive.
  - Ecclesiastical Parishes in the Diocese of Durham and south Teesdale parishes in the Diocese of Leeds.
  - Other religious bodies based in County Durham and Darlington.
  - Businesses and industries in County Durham and Darlington.

- Trades Unions and Employers' Associations in County Durham and Darlington.
- Estate and family records.
- A wide range of community groups, charities, organisations and individuals whose activities are relevant to County Durham and Darlington.

5.1.5 Our collections include printed and published material relating to County Durham and Darlington:

- Books and pamphlets on local and family history.
- Local weekly newspapers.
- Maps and plans.
- Postcards and prints.

5.1.6 We acquire our collections by:

- Gift, including bequest – our preferred option.
- Long-term loan.
- Transfer as Public Records.
- Purchase – of publications and, very exceptionally, of archives.

5.1.7 We clarify ownership and provenance of collections before we acquire them and we prioritise collections at risk of damage or destruction.

5.1.8 We select collections by:

- Appraising all collections offered to us to ensure that we preserve records of historical importance.
- Following national and local guidelines on selection and appraisal.
- Liaising with owners and users, including options for keeping information in communities, for example by providing digital copies.

5.1.9 We dispose of unwanted material in accordance with our Collecting Policy, Appraisal Policy and Deaccessioning Policy. We may suggest alternative repositories for collections.

5.1.10 We do not sell archives. We may sell printed material from our collections where it is owned by Durham County Council and duplicates our holdings or does not relate to County Durham. Any income raised is used to help care for the archives.

## 5.2 Collections development

We develop our collections by:

- Formal arrangements for continuing deposits of Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council archives, Parish archives and transfers of Public Records.
- Maintaining contact with our archive owners and donors to ensure that our existing archive collections grow over time.

- Identifying and consulting with under-represented groups to make new contacts, identify new collections that are worth preserving and raise awareness of archives among new audiences.
- Raising awareness of archives through our community engagement and outreach activities.
- Working with communities to identify collections that may benefit from transfer into our care.
- Monitoring organisations that have ceased to exist or people who have died, through local press and networks.
- Researching, developing and sharing strategies and tools that will help to meet new challenges, for example in preserving digital records.
- Working closely with regional and national archive service networks to ensure collections are acquired by the most appropriate service and information about them is widely available.
- Liaising with the Friends of Durham County Record Office, Friends of the DLI, County Durham Forum for History and Heritage and other local and national groups to secure significant archive material, including when offered for sale, for example at auction.
- Purchasing new publications, acquiring publications as part of agreements to reproduce documents, and managing the DCRO reference library.

### 5.3 **We encourage people to gather and retain their own collections by**

- Offering advice and support on creating and caring for collections.
- Offering advice on the most appropriate options for long-term preservation.
- Working with and supporting community archive projects, including advising them in developing grant applications.
- Liaising with regional archive services, Durham University Library Archives and Special Collections, museums and heritage centres in County Durham and Darlington so that our collecting activities complement each other and we share information about collections.

## 6 **Standards**

6.1 See Appendix 2 for statutory position.

6.2 The policy is underpinned by:

- the requirements of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard, 2013
- current government policies on archives, Archives for the 21st century 2009 and Archives Unlocked 2017
- Guidelines published by The National Archives to appraise Public Records.
- Guidelines published by lead professionals (the Information and Records Management Society and the Archives and Records Association) to appraise records created by local government, schools and businesses.

- Other nationally recognised best practice guidelines, such as The Church of England's records management guides for parish and diocesan records.
- Guidelines developed in-house for appraising records created by private individuals, families, societies and businesses.

## **7 Roles and responsibilities**

- 7.1 DCC Corporate Management Team is responsible for approving the corporate framework for the preservation of semi-current and archival records as set out in this policy.
- 7.2 DCC Corporate Directors are responsible for developing service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records.
- 7.3 DCC Heads of Services are responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources are in place to enable compliance with the Collections Development Policy.
- 7.4 Individual Employees are responsible for the records they create and will follow service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records. DCC owns the information that individual employees create.
- 7.5 The County Archivist is responsible for DCRO's Collections Development Policy, and will provide guidance and support to services and elected members in order to support its aims.
- 7.6 The Collections Development Policy will apply to records created by Elected Members as part of their Council work.

## **8 Communication**

- 8.1 The Collections Development Policy will be published on the DCRO website.
- 8.2 We will promote our Collections Development Policy through our community engagement and outreach work, and networks.

## **9 Audit**

- 9.1 DCRO will develop procedures to enable the effective monitoring of the Collections Development Policy.

## **10 Risk Management**

- 10.1 Without a policy and procedures to manage collections development, there are a series of risks:
- Disposing of significant archives, irretrievable loss of historically important records.
  - Organisations, individuals and 'hard-to-reach' groups may be under-represented in the written heritage of County Durham and Darlington.

## **11 Review**

We will review this policy every three years.

## **12 Contacts**

Liz Bregazzi, County Archivist, Durham County Record Office, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UL. Tel: (03000) 267619. E-mail: [liz.bregazzi@durham.gov.uk](mailto:liz.bregazzi@durham.gov.uk)



## Appendix 1

### Glossary

**Archive:** a group of records created by an organisation or individual in the course of daily activities but no longer needed by them for regular reference. The individual records in an archive can vary in format but each is a combination of a medium and the information recorded on or in it; for example single sheets of paper with typed or handwritten text, maps, bound volumes, photographic negatives and prints, audio-visual recordings and digital documents/files.

**Accessioning:** the process of bringing archives under the intellectual and custodial control of a preservation environment.

**Appraisal:** the process of deciding whether an item or group of items has continuing value in accordance with the collecting organisation's mission statement.

**Disposal:** the physical act of transferring the collection or item from the archive service to another destination. This covers transfer to another repository, return to depositor or donor and, as a last resort, destruction.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Statutory Position and Standards**

Durham County Council has a statutory duty to provide an archives service, to preserve and make accessible archives in whatever format they may be created.

Relevant legislation:

- Public Records Act 1958
- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations Act 2004
- Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978
- The Law of Property (Amendment) Act 1924
- The Manorial Documents Rules 1926
- The Tithe (Copies of Instruments of Appropriation) Rules 1960

Standards play an important role in appraisal. Standards that are relevant to the management of all archives:

- Archive Service Accreditation Standard 2013
- British Standard for archive storage BS 4971:2017
- Information and Records Management Society Retention guidelines for Local Authorities 2003