

Collections Information Policy

Dorset History Centre
Bridport Road
Dorchester
DT1 1RP



Service Description

The Joint Archives Service (JAS), based at Dorset History Centre (hereafter 'DHC') is operated on behalf of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole (BCP) Council, and Dorset Council. Partnership between the two authorities as delivered through the joint service sits at the heart of JAS activities and underwrites the protocols and processes by which DHC preserves material.

DHC is the sole local authority archive within the county with Accredited status as designated by The National Archives. Local studies and records management functions are undertaken on behalf of Dorset Council. We are also the appointed place of deposit by the Diocese of Salisbury for the Archdeacons of Sherborne and Dorset.

1. Aim and purpose

Archives are documents (hand-written, printed items, maps, plans, slides, postcards, photographs, audio-visual material, digital records, and comparable items in diverse physical formats) from all dates. They are authentic and reliable records that have been selected through a process of appraisal as being worthy of permanent preservation because of their evidential, legal, and historical value.

DHC is dedicated to preserving, sharing, and celebrating the rich heritage of Dorset. The service gathers archive collections and local and family history resources to ensure they are kept secure and made accessible

This policy explains the information DHC collects on the material it receives and how it describes, processes, and controls its collections. DHC recognises that correct and proper documentation of its collections, through both accessioning, cataloguing, disposal, and location management is essential for proper collections management and enabling public access.

2. Scope

This policy applies to archive collections relating to Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole, and Dorset; local and family history resources relating to Dorset held at DHC.

3. Point of Deposit and Accessioning

DHC maintains an accession register for all purchases, donations, deposits, and transfers both in a physical volume and within our archive management system. This includes recording any information needed to authenticate the ownership and legal status of material. Every individual deposit at DHC is allocated a unique accession number which is subsequently linked to catalogue reference numbers.

Information recorded includes the following:

- Date of deposit
- Accession number,
- Accession category (Donation, Deposit, Transfer, Purchase etc.)
- Any access restrictions (due to depositors' conditions, sensitivity of information, etc.)
- Name and contact details of depositor(s)
- Any known copyright restrictions
- Title, covering dates, and summary description of deposit
- Extent of deposit
- Any known administrative and custodial history

Information concerning the physical condition of collections is also recorded at the point of deposit and during accessioning. Any urgent conservation interventions required are undertaken at this point, and the information recorded is then accessible to inform whether documents are unfit for production, planning for conservation elements of funding projects, or projects for volunteers or student placements.

Temporary and final receipts are produced for every deposit or donation of archives. Related information, (including copies of receipts, correspondence, information about temporary/permanent withdrawals etc.) is permanently retained outside the archive management system in a series of donor or depositor files stored within our repositories.

A summary of information about our accessions is submitted by DHC to The National Archives as part of its annual [‘Accessions to Repositories’](#) survey.

4. Restrictions and Closure Periods

DHC's collections contain records that have access restrictions or closure periods either because of Data Protection legislation, advice and guidance from The National Archives and the Information Commissioner's Office, or they may have been imposed by the depositor. Dorset Council's Records Management Service and Information Compliance team also offer guidance and advice to the Service in this respect. Existing catalogued collections are also reviewed by DHC to ensure that sensitive or personal information is not released.

DHC encourages depositors not to impose unnecessary restrictions on access to collections when deposited.

Users are made aware of any restrictions on records and their rationale. Staff follow documented procedures to advise users of actions required to enable access to particular classes of restricted records.

5. Cataloguing

DHC catalogues its records in order to protect the integrity of its collections, enable staff to effectively manage the information retained for permanent preservation, and make the records discoverable and accessible by the public as appropriate. Qualified archivists plan and carry out the cataloguing following the archival principles of provenance, and original order. They may also allocate tasks to support staff and volunteers according to the complexity of the tasks required and the skills and experience of the individual, all whilst ensuring adherence to professional standards. Volunteers only ever work with non-sensitive collections.

6. Standards

Any new cataloguing undertaken by DHC conforms to current professional standards, using the principles and mandatory elements of the International Council on Archives' General Standard of Archival Description (ISAD(G)). When old paper finding aids and catalogues are converted and added to our archive management system, all reasonable efforts are made to ensure conformity with the mandatory elements of ISAD(G).

The following standards are in use at DHC for creating controlled access terms:

- UK Archival Thesaurus
- International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR, CPF)
- National Council on Archives, Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names

Additionally, DHC's cataloguing manual describes the processes and procedures involved in cataloguing archives and documents the in-house style.

7. Locations and movement control

DHC aims to keep full intellectual and physical control over the records in its custody. During accessioning, the location of the new accession is recorded in the Accessions Database and on a separate Excel locations spreadsheet. It is envisaged that these two systems of recording locations, along with old paper location lists that are currently being converted to Excel will be reduced/merged to solely being recorded in DHC's archive management system. When accessions are catalogued, boxes are relabelled, and new locations are updated.

The Document Production database captures the following information each time a document is removed from the repositories:

- References and/or description of records being produced
- Date of production
- Location
- Initials of staff producing,
- Surname of the researcher
- Date of return and the initials of staff returning the documents.

Triplicate production tickets are used when documents are produced, with one copy remaining at the document's original location in the repository, one at the production desk, and one with the document at all times. These are then all reconciled when documents are returned, and the Document Production database updated. Production tickets are retained for five years before being destroyed.

A Temporary Withdrawal form is completed if a depositor wishes to temporarily withdraw documents. This provides contact information, details of the records being withdrawn, the reason for withdrawal, and an estimated date of return. These details are also recorded in the Temporary Withdrawal database, and the completed Temporary Withdrawal form is filed. On the records' return the form is signed and moved to a return file and the database is updated. The database highlights any outstanding loans, and any outstanding loans for the previous year are followed up. Items withdrawn are noted as such in the archive management system, and production tickets and the Document Production database also record this information.

Should a record be identified as missing, a procedure is followed, with the document recorded on a missing documents database if still not found. This information is also recorded in the archive management system and is updated when the record is located.

8. Archive Software

DHC uses Metadatis' Epexio Describe to maintain intellectual control over its archive holdings. This includes accession records, depositor details, archive descriptions (catalogue) and related authority files. DHC is working towards managing locations, conservation information, document production, and loans through the archive management software.

Public access is provided to catalogue descriptions online via Metadatis' Epexio Discover platform, available at <https://archive-catalogue.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/>.

9. Digital Archives

The intellectual management of digital collections is closely aligned to the process for physical archives. The same accessioning process is followed regardless of format. Digital archives are stored in DHC's digital repository, Preservica. Technical and preservation metadata is stored in Preservica alongside the digital assets.

Descriptive metadata is generated using existing file or folder names where possible. Archivists ensure this metadata facilitates searching and will amend if necessary. The digital assets in Preservica are linked to their corresponding catalogue records in Epexio via metadata shared between the two systems. The archive management system (Epexio) is the master system for descriptive metadata.

10. Backlogs and improving access

Staffing resources for cataloguing are extremely limited. This, along with the fact that many of DHC's collections were received before the development of modern standards for cataloguing, mean that there are significant backlogs of material that require cataloguing, and catalogues/indexes that require conversion into digital format from paper. DHC's aim is to produce collection/fonds-level descriptions (with box-lists if appropriate) for all new accessions and to list small collections in full detail as soon as is reasonably possible. Full catalogues for collections will give detailed descriptions of the contents, generally down to item level with this being a document or bundle that can be ordered in the search room.

DHC also carries out the following activities to improve descriptions of, and access to, its holdings:

- prioritisation activities to ensure staffing resources are targeted appropriately
- proactively exploring possibilities for external funding to catalogue significant collections and reduce cataloguing backlog

- recruiting and training volunteers to create item level descriptions for box-lists, to enhance poorly detailed older catalogues or to contribute to externally funded cataloguing projects
- encouraging owners to list their collections on a supplied template following guidance before donating or depositing their records with us; and importing this data to our online catalogue
- converting old paper box-lists to create usable online catalogue descriptions (accepting that the levels of detail will be quite brief and will lack the structure and contextual information found in a full catalogue)
- where necessary deaccessioning collections following appraisal, and either offering material back to the depositor or another suitable institution, or if permission has been granted, disposing of confidentially

11. Permanent Withdrawals and Deaccessioning

Depositors retain the right to withdraw their records from DHC. Any records that are permanently withdrawn from DHC have their entry in the archive management system updated to reflect this. Written confirmation of the records' withdrawal is kept in the deposit file. Depositors are made aware at the time of deposit that DHC reserves the right to make a charge to cover part of the cost of any cataloguing and/or conservation work carried out on items within the collection should it be withdrawn.

DHC records on deposit all permissions given by the depositor for records to be either returned, destroyed or transferred to another appropriate archive if the records fall outside our Acquisition Policy. For deaccessioning a record of any disposal is permanently kept in the deposit file

12. Equalities and diversity

DHC and Dorset Council are firmly committed to the principles of equality and diversity in the workforce and in the service we provide to our customers. We recognise, respect and value difference and diversity.

DHC recognises that some of its catalogues may contain some terms which are offensive, and some whose meaning has changed over time. Such anachronistic and/or pejorative terms exist within some original records and have been retained so as to inform users of the nature and content of the sources concerned. They do not reflect the views of the Service or its parent councils. When creating new catalogue entries for items which include offensive terms, we try to include a modern explanation where possible.

13. Roles and responsibilities

Day-to-day collections management activities are carried out by, or under the direction of, qualified archivists.

The Archivist (Collections) is responsible for policy revisions, and for ensuring the policy and related procedures are followed.

14. References

14.1. Relevant standards

[International Council on Archives, General International Standard Archival Description \[ISAD \(G\)\], 2nd edition, 1999](#)

[International Council on Archives, International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families \(ISAAR \(CPF\), 2004\)](#)

[National Council on Archives, Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names, 1997](#)

14.2. Other references

This policy should be read in conjunction with our other policies, especially our access policy, acquisition policy, and collections development policy, to be found at

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/dorset-history-centre/about-dorset-history-centre.aspx>

Our Terms of Agreement for the deposit of archives can also be found at

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/dorset-history-centre/terms-of-agreement-deposit-of-archives-at-dorset-history-centre.aspx>

15. Review of the policy

This policy will be reviewed in consultation with interested organisations, stakeholders and individuals every 3 years. It will next be reviewed in June 2024.