

# Library of Birmingham Birmingham Archives & Collections Collections Care and Conservation Policy



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## **Introduction**

The mission of Birmingham Archives and Collections is to acquire, preserve and promote the archives of the City of Birmingham, its people, businesses, institutions and societies, making these records as widely accessible as possible.

## **Aim of the Policy**

- To preserve the archival holdings and special collections at Library of Birmingham
- To support the work of the conservator and ensure the professional standing of the conservator within the organisation
- To raise preservation awareness amongst staff and users through training, display, policy development and service liaison
- To ensure that the highest standards of conservation are maintained and ICON's codes of ethics are adhered to
- To ensure the long-term access to the collections at Library of Birmingham for current and future stakeholders

## **Buildings and Security**

### ***Security***

Public access to the Wolfson Centre for archival research is controlled and closely supervised by staff. Researchers can only enter or exit through a locked door controlled by archives staff. Attendance to the Wolfson Centre is by appointment only and is limited to no more than 20 people to ensure sufficient staff coverage to safeguard the material being viewed.

Access to storage areas is restricted to archive staff and other authorised people and the storage areas are only accessible by key card.

There are 170 CCTV cameras throughout the building (including the Repertory Theatre with which the Library of Birmingham shares the site) recording 24 hours a day. The library has 24 hour security guards who regularly patrol the building.

### ***Buildings/Storage***

The Library of Birmingham superseded Birmingham Central Library and opened in September 2013. The building conforms to PD 5454:2012. The building shares Ground floor space with Birmingham Repertory Theatre. The Library of Birmingham also rents office space to tenants. The building has a floor area of 35000 square meters consisting of 13 floors which are:

**Lower Ground** – Public Area and Conservation 'quarantine area' and Library stack areas

## **Middle Ground – Plant**

**Ground Floor** – Public Area which adjoins onto the Rep Theatre and cafe

## **Mezzanine** – Facilities and Building Ops

- 1** – Brasshouse Language School [Tenant] and Institute of Directors (Tenant)
- 2** – Public area, Library stock and Brasshouse offices (Tenants)
- 3** – Public area with exhibition space, offices and a garden terrace
- 4** – Wolfson Centre, Heritage Research Area, Conservation Studio, staff offices, Heritage learning space and Digital Lab
- 5** – Archives storage
- 6** – Archives storage
- 7** – Staff offices, 7 Wonder (Tenant), garden terrace and public area
- 8** – Plant
- 9** – Public Area and Plant

The Library of Birmingham recognises the need to store archival material in appropriate conditions. All material is stored in the recommended storage conditions most suited to the object type as set out in PD5454:2012. The Library of Birmingham has 6 dedicated archive store rooms. In each of these store rooms we are able to control relative humidity, temperature and oxygen level as the stores use a hypoxic method of fire suppression.

The stores comprise of: one large paper store, one outsize paper store (predominately for large/rolled plans and other outsize items), one store kept at 8°C, for photographic material. Three of the stores are not currently in use but can be used to store any object type because of the ability to control humidity, temperature and oxygen.

## ***Mitigation***

Due to the risk of fire arising from this type of material, all Cellulose Nitrate negatives are stored off site. As the freezer store is not currently commissioned, all cellulose acetate negatives are also stored off-site. Both materials are currently stored with Harwell Document Restoration Services.

## **Collection Care**

### ***Storage Facilities***

The Library of Birmingham provides 5595 cubic metres of mobile and static shelving for archive material and special collections. All storage furniture conforms to BS 5454:2012

The Library of Birmingham has specialised facilities for the storage of various materials in the following formats:

- Oversized Flat and rolled plans and maps - larger shelves and drawers
- Oversized Volumes and boxes - larger shelves

- Frames, prints and paintings - vertical hanging racks
- Artefacts – larger shelves

The Library of Birmingham is committed to the continuous review and improvement of security and storage of its collections.

### ***Temperature and Relative Humidity (RH)***

The Library of Birmingham recognises the importance of maintaining and controlling a stable environment to prolong the life and maintain archival and library material.

All environmental factors- Temperature, relative humidity (RH), light, air borne pollutants and oxygen levels are monitored and recorded into the Building Management System (BMS). These readings are monitored, interpreted and assessed.

Temperature and RH are controlled to set points for the following stores:

**Floor 5:** 18°C and 50% RH +/- 2°C +/- 5%

**Outside store:** 18°C and 50% RH +/- 2°C +/- 5%

**AV store:** 8°C and 35%RH +/- 2°C +/- 5%

All empty stores are switched off.

The Library of Birmingham aims to provide a constant and stable environment for all its collections.

### ***Light***

Light exposure in storage areas is kept to a minimum. When storage areas are not in use all light is switched off. There are no windows in the storage areas. All windows in public areas and offices have a layer of UV protective film.

### ***Air-Bourne Pollutants***

All stores have filtration systems to filter all air-bourne pollutants. These are serviced every 6 months and all filters are replaced.

### ***Hypoxic Environment***

All archival storage areas are covered by a hypoxic fire suppressant system. The system works by introducing nitrogen into a space, reducing the overall oxygen level by 5-6%. In doing so, it ensures that a fire cannot start. The reduced oxygen level is maintained 24 hours a day, providing protection to all collections within the stores.

Access to the stores is via an airlock. The hypoxic system continues to protect the collections, even if it is not operational. By keeping all doors closed, the atmosphere would remain at such a level that it could prevent a fire from starting for up to 72 hours.

### ***Pest Monitoring***

Museum blunder traps are put down in all storage areas, the Wolfson Centre, and areas which potentially could contain archives and special collections. These are then checked quarterly to monitor insect activity. All information is entered into a spreadsheet. There are regular assessments of the building to check for rodent damage. All material is checked for pests and mould before being accessioned.

If material contains mould or is infested, it is separated and treated before it can be accessioned. If material is considered to pose a risk to repository or other collections it will not be accessioned. Please refer to Collection Development policy.

### ***Housekeeping***

All archival storage areas are dry cleaned every 6 weeks. Food and drink is strictly forbidden in all storage areas and in reading rooms.

### ***Packaging***

Stocks of standard sized archival boxes are available for use by staff. Specialist enclosures/ housing is made or ordered as required.

The Library of Birmingham also has a Kasemake KM504 box-making machine which can potentially be used by us to make bespoke enclosures, housing and mounts.

Please refer to Library of Birmingham's packaging guidelines for more detail.

## **Access**

### ***Reprographics***

The Library of Birmingham supports the use of surrogates where possible to prolong the life of original material. These must be of archival standard in order to be classed as preservation copies. Preservation copies can be any of the following formats:

- Microfilm/fiche
- Photocopies
- Photographs
- Digital scans, digital imagery, etc.

### ***Digitisation***

A proportion of our collections have been digitised. These can be viewed in the following places:

[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<http://www.libraryofbirmingham.com/collections>

<http://www.birminghamimages.org.uk/>

<http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/>

<http://damsdeepzoom.shoother.com/>

<http://calmview.birmingham.gov.uk/CalmView/>

Any records that are deemed unfit or are in need of repair will not be digitised without prior conservation treatment. This is so items are in a handle-able state. Damaged items are flagged up during the digitisation process if unable to be handled and scanned safely. Externally funded digitisation bids have a full survey before any work takes place. If a digital version is available the original document is not served. Please see Digital Preservation Policy and Strategy for more information.

### ***Photocopying***

Library of Birmingham recognises that photocopying can be very damaging to archival material, especially bound volumes. Under no circumstances will archival or 'at risk' material be photocopied. The library doesn't currently offer a copying service; researchers are encouraged to take their own photographs of documents, without a flash. Non-archival material can be photocopied, subject to copyright and conservation issues, at the discretion of staff.

### ***Microfilming***

Library of Birmingham has a large quantity of material on microfilm; particularly historical local newspapers and copies of parish records. These are in open access cabinets and researchers may help themselves. Parts of the microfilm collection are only served in the Wolfson Centre. These are distinguished from microfilms on open access if the original document does not exist anymore, therefore the microfilm is the archival document. The microfilms are of archival quality.

### ***Exhibitions and Loans***

The library has a dedicated exhibition space which is used for in-house exhibitions. All archival material, if requested for exhibition or loan is assessed by conservation and may be treated prior to display and release. Conservation will also advise on materials used within the exhibition and the conditions of display. All loaned items must travel under the constant supervision of a member of Library of Birmingham staff, or an authorized representative. Highly damaged items are not displayed and a facsimile copy is offered instead.

Loans are assessed on a case by case basis. Please refer to the Exhibitions and Loan policy for more information.

### ***Handling***

Library of Birmingham recognises the benefit of training all staff to have an awareness of preservation.

Handling training is offered for all members of staff. Handling training is mandatory for Archives and Collections staff, Research Associates and Trusted Partners before they can access original archival material. Book supports, light weights and vinyl gloves are provided for staff and readers. Illustrated instructions are provided in the Wolfson Centre. At risk items are only viewed under strict staff supervision.

Television/ film companies/ media may wish to use archival documents as a source for their programming/ photos. All companies and documents are supervised at all times. If an individual item is requested for filming, conservation is required to supervise and advise on the handling of archival material.

## **Remedial Conservation**

### ***Assessment***

A programme is in place to assess the condition of archive collections. This will be done through the use of surveys. Due to the size of the collections a full survey is not feasible and a sample survey may be the chosen methodology. Survey aims include packaging needs, condition of items for externally funded projects, etc.

Conservation enquiry forms are used to identify archival items that are damaged. Items being accessioned, catalogued, in circulation or being used in the Wolfson centre are checked for condition and if suspected of needing treatment, a Conservation Enquiry form is filled in. This is then assessed once a month by a Conservator and an Archivist. After assessment the object is recorded as fit, at risk or unfit. They are then potentially treated or returned to the stores.

All survey information is recorded into Excel spreadsheets and the CALM database in the Conservation section and the catalogue entry (if possible.)

### ***Priorities***

Conservation treatments are prioritised and based on the needs of the collections, access issues and the objectives of the Collection Development Policy.

Due to the number of objects within the collection (over 16,000m of shelving) it is not feasible to treat them all. Prioritising work therefore is essential.

Individual items are prioritised for conservation treatment depending on demand, the context within a collection and the condition of the item in question. The main methods for objects to be considered for conservation treatment are:

- **Access:** When an item cannot be accessed due to its condition, these items are treated where possible. Minor treatments such as removing ties, staples, pins and un-locking locks can be carried out on demand where appropriate.
- **Exhibition and loans:** Items for exhibition and loan are assessed and treated if required. The borrower must comply with the loan agreement.



- **New acquisitions:** All new material entering the archive is assessed. Items containing mould, pests and extremely dirty items are separated. Occasionally items may require repackaging.
- **Conservation enquiry forms:** These are completed by staff and readers. These are then assessed. After the assessment, the item is either returned, listed as Unfit/At Risk or may be potentially treated. If estimated treatment time is less than 15 hours this could be potentially treated internally. If treatment time is more than 15 hours, other options may be explored.
- **Projects:** Conservation projects will be carried out in addition to day to day duties. Potential projects are identified and organised if funding and resources are available.

### ***Documentation***

The Library of Birmingham recognises that accurate documentation is essential.

All documentation is in electronic form and is either recorded on Excel spreadsheets and/or in the Conservation module of Calm. Details entered into the database include the object's reference; date of entry to conservation, object type, condition before treatment, details of treatment, materials used, housing, the names of the conservator(s) who treated the item(s) and the date treatment is completed. Exhibition and loan agreements are also recorded.

Photographic documentation is taken throughout the object's treatment.

### ***Treatment***

All treatments undertaken on objects are done with the intention of retaining the object's integrity. Treatments emphasise minimal intervention.

All repairs will be detectable and reversible. Repairs will not obscure any information on an object. Sympathetic materials will be used for repair of objects to avoid stresses and distortions. Materials used for repair are chemically and physically sound and will not damage any original material.

All original material from an object that has not been used in its repair will be kept alongside the original object.

### **On-going professional development**

Library of Birmingham supports its conservation staff in continuing their professional development. Library of Birmingham will fund and support (where appropriate) external training. Library of Birmingham supports ICON's professional accreditation.

Conservation staff are expected to maintain and develop a high level of awareness of up-to-date research on materials and practices within Collection Care and Conservation through the use of workshops, conferences and self-study.

## **Partnerships and projects**

Library of Birmingham welcomes and encourages partnerships with external organisations, such as the partnership with the British Library. This has resulted in a successful collaboration culminating in a joint exhibition at the Library of Birmingham. Other successful partnerships include those with Universities and Museums such as 'Connecting Histories' and 'Children's lives.'

Future collaboration and bids will always take into consideration the conservation and collection care needs of individual items and collections.

## **Emergency/Disaster Planning and response**

The Library of Birmingham has up-to-date Emergency planning, Incident and Fire Evacuation Procedures. Library of Birmingham has an up-to-date fire certificate.

Fire detection in all the stores at the Library of Birmingham is an Aspirating Smoke Detector (ASD) system. The ASDs can detect smoke before it is visible to the naked eye. Outside of the store areas fire detection devices are smoke detectors.

Water sprinklers are not present in storage areas as the stores use a Hypoxic method of fire suppression. Water sprinklers are present in other areas of the building.

Fire extinguishers are located throughout the building. Library of Birmingham uses water and CO<sub>2</sub> to extinguish any fire.

Emergency equipment/ disaster recovery equipment is located in strategic areas in the building.

Library of Birmingham has an annual contract with Harwell Document Restoration Services. The Emergency/ disaster plan includes detailed information on various salvage techniques, location of emergency equipment, plans of the building, procedures for minor and major incidents, contacts list, suppliers list, insurance and health and safety issues.

## **Procedure for review**

This policy document requires review every two years. The next review date is March 2019, unless circumstances dictate otherwise.