

# Newcastle University Library Special Collections Preservation Policy

## 1. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles that are integral to the preservation activities of Newcastle University Library's Special Collections department. The policy is intended to define preservation responsibilities, and provide guidance to staff who engage in activities which may impact on collections.

### 1.1 Context

This preservation policy is a high-level statement, which is complemented by the following documents:

- Collection Development Policy
- Digitisation Policy
- Disaster Plan
- Document Handling Guidelines
- Loan Conditions (Exhibitions)
- Reading Room Regulations
- Retention Policy

### 1.2 Definitions

*Preservation* can be defined as 'all managerial, technical and financial considerations applied to retard deterioration and extend the useful life of (collection) materials to ensure their continued availability'.<sup>1</sup> *Conservation* is the use of interventive treatments to improve the physical, chemical and visual conditions of items.

### 1.3 Roles and Responsibilities

All Special Collections staff and Robinson Bequest Bursary Students are responsible for implementing the preservation policy, as appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.

The Head of Special Collections & Archives is responsible for co-ordinating preservation activities.

## 2. Special Collections Mission

Newcastle University Library supports the University's learning and teaching, research, innovation and engagement by providing resources, high quality services, and professional expertise to enable the effective discovery and use of information, and the development and communication of knowledge.

Special Collections accomplishes this by collecting, preserving, promoting and facilitating access to rare or unique primary source material and historic secondary texts which it makes available to our own staff and students, to researchers from other institutions, and anyone in the wider community

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<sup>1</sup> P. Eden, et al. *A model for assessing preservation needs in libraries* (London: British Library Research and Innovation Centre, 1998)

who is interested in the material. It seeks recognition of the regional, national and international significance of important collections, and the quality of its custodianship towards these collections and their diverse audiences. Its activities include engagement through exhibition and outreach programmes devised in partnership with stakeholders internal and external to the University.

Special Collections actively collaborates with our communities, including the co-development of research and infrastructure, particularly around digital scholarship. It seeks to benchmark itself against best practice in the sector towards continual and inclusive improvement in all aspects of management and curation.

### **3. Preserving Special Collections Materials**

Special Collections materials are rich and varied: we have rare books and other printed works, such as pamphlets and Parliamentary papers; manuscripts; photographs; maps; ephemera, such as playbills, posters, state of the poll election figures and political cartoons; architectural plans and models; oral history recordings; moving image recordings; music scores; illustrations and even museum objects. Increasingly a large proportion of our holdings exists in a born-digital format.

These materials are subject to natural deterioration, the rate of which is accelerated by handling in the case of analogue materials. Digital files are vulnerable to data degradation over time.

#### **3.1 Preservation Principles**

Preservation of its collections is a core function for the Special Collections department. The main aims of the preservation strategy are to preserve the collections and facilitate access to them, consistent with usage requirements and current physical conditions. The Special Collections department recognises that different items and collections may need different levels and types of care. In all of its preservation activities, Special Collections applies high standards of care and seeks external professional advice, where appropriate. The Special Collections department also recognises the need for adequate documentation and metadata to support effective planning, informed decision making and to shape future strategic objectives.

The Preservation Advisory Centre's Preservation Assessment Survey was completed in 2006. This analysis of our preservation needs and measures informed the prioritisation of actions to improve the condition of collections, such as the creation of a new storage facility which was completed in September 2009. Special Collections maintains active professional relationships with external organisations in order to share best practice and, as far as possible, achieve collections care benchmarks.

### **4. Preservation Aims**

Through its preservation strategy, the Special Collections department aims to:

- Assess and minimise risks to the collections.
- Stabilise damage so that the material can continue to be accessed.
- Repair significant damage that prevents material from being accessed.
- Provide surrogates of heavily-used materials.

## 5. Specific Preservation Activities

### 5.1 Acquisition

Special collections and archival material is acquired in accordance with the Special Collections **Collection Development Policy**. The Library considers preservation and conservation costs when making decisions about potential additions to its Special Collections holdings.

### 5.2 Security

Terms of access will have security measures built-in to protect the collections from theft, vandalism, and accidental damage when in use. The Reading Room is equipped with CCTV. The Reading Room and storage areas are protected by controlled keys and codes, as well as an alarm system. All maintenance work in Special Collections areas is supervised.

### 5.3 Storage

Special Collections will house its collections in secure, environmentally controlled and monitored storage areas that conform, as far as possible, to the current recognised professional standards for the storage of archival and other collections material. It is the responsibility of Special Collections staff to inform the Head of Library Estates Services of building defects and to ensure that the building continues to meet specifications. The Head of Library Estates Services liaises with the Estate Support Service to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

As part of a regular maintenance programme, material will be cleaned using a soft brush or Museumvac, as appropriate. Initial training will be provided to all staff who clean the collections, the work will be supervised by the Head of Special Collections & Archives, and written guidelines will be provided.

Born-digital material is stored on a secure server along with a deep storage-Azure cloud backup. Special Collections works closely with Newcastle University's IT Service (NUIT) over the continued maintenance and management of this arrangement.

### 5.4. Disaster and Emergency Preparedness

Special Collections will maintain a **Disaster Plan** to protect its collections by responding to threats posed by fire and flood. It will also maintain a list of salvage priorities.

### 5.5 Access

Access to the collections will be provided in an invigilated reading room, where researchers will be provided with necessary equipment (book supports and chain weights).

Researchers must comply with our **Document and Book Handling Guidelines** (Appendix 1) when they consult material in the Reading Room.

Use of particularly fragile material may be restricted.

Access to collections is also provided through a remote consultation service (Virtual Reading Room) as well as through selected and on-demand Digitisation.

## 5.6 Packaging

Special Collections will implement a programme of re-packaging to ensure that materials are housed in suitable containers, such as acid-free boxes, folders and envelopes where required to protect items.

## 5.7 Reproduction

In order to ensure material is handled appropriately, material may only be digitised by the Digitisation Technician or Digitisation Assistant (subject to copyright and Data Protection legislation; and to the format and condition of the item). Where the risk of damage to the original item is too great, requests digitisation may be declined. Digitisation will be performed on a flatbed scanner or using an overhead camera and book supports depending on the format, size and condition of the original document.

Researchers must seek the permission of Special Collections staff but are allowed to use digital cameras to take photographs for private research. The use of flash photography is not permitted.

Material will be digitised to meet the needs of the Special Collections department according to the priorities identified in the **Digitisation Policy**, which makes provision for preservation digitisation.

## 5.8 Digital Preservation

Special Collections recognises the importance of maintaining access to digital items and has developed in-house workflows and procedures for the curation of digital collections material in accordance with guidance from the National Archives and in consultation with the IT Support and Development Officer.

## 5.9 Conservation

Priorities for conservation are determined by the following criteria:

- Degree of damage and potential deterioration
- Historical significance
- Demand for access to the material (either demonstrated or projected)

Conservation activities will be carried out by an accredited conservator.

## 5.10 Exhibition and Loan

The physical condition and preservation needs of items are considered when selecting material for display. Surrogates will be used whenever an item is deemed to be unsuitable for display. Best practice display methods will be followed, as set out in the Preservation Advisory Centre's *Guidance for exhibiting archive and library materials* (2000).

The loan of original material for exhibition must be approved by the Librarian, or Deputy Librarian, in consultation with the Head of Special Collections & Archives. Loan for exhibition will usually be approved only if it can be demonstrated that the standards of care in the temporary location satisfy the terms set out in the **Loan Conditions (Exhibitions)** document and on satisfactory completion of the **Application for Exhibition Loan** form.

## **5.11 Staff Training and Development**

Special Collections staff will be required to participate in relevant in-house and external training relating to preservation and conservation, as appropriate to their roles.

Last revised July 2024

Approved by the Library Strategy Group, 16/07/2024.

To be reviewed annually

## **Newcastle University Library Special Collections Document and Book Handling Guidelines (Appendix 1)**

We ask for your help in trying to preserve our collections by taking care when using them.

### **PLEASE:**

- Use the lockers provided for stowing coats, bags and other bulky items.
- Ensure your hands are clean and lotion-free before handling material.
- Use the book supports and chain weights provided. (You may need to adjust the support so that it cradles the book properly.)
- Keep loose items in the correct order, and in the right box or packet.
- Where present, re-tie tapes around books and folders after use.
- Close manuscript binders carefully and ensure that plastic pockets are lying flat within the binder.
- Use pencil or a laptop for taking notes.
- Ask a member of staff for sheets of Perspex when tracing.
- When handling photographic material, use the nitrile gloves provided.
- Report any damage you discover.
- Seek permission to take photographs. (The use of flash photography is not permitted.)
- Comply with Copyright and Data Protection legislation.

### **PLEASE DO NOT:**

- Remove items from the Reading Room.
- Bring food or drink into the Reading Room.
- Mark, or make erasures, in any item.
- Place open items face-down, lean, or rest anything on them.
- Cut untrimmed pages: hand the item to the member of staff on duty.