

IWCRO Collections Care and Conservation Policy

A) INTRODUCTION

A1) MISSION Statement and Aims

The aim of the Isle of Wight County Record Office (afterwards IWCRO) is to collect records which reflect the history and diversity of the Isle of Wight and its inhabitants. It will then provide conditions to ensure the conservation of these records for present and future generations. IWCRO will also make these records universally accessible to researchers, Isle of Wight Council and other bodies, both through the Record Office search room and through an outreach programme. This outreach will enhance understanding and inform local decision making, as well as strengthening local community and cultural identity.

A2) Purpose of this Policy

This document defines how IWCRO will care for records its custody. It will outline how IWCRO aims to provide suitable storage and professional management of the collections in its care. It will also consider the provision of access to the collections, both on-site and remotely, without compromising the security and safety of documents in its care.

Accompanying documents will address the parameters within which these records are collected and the recording procedures used. Further documents will address in more detail the steps taken to ensure access to the documents collected by this office.

In the context of this and accompanying policies, Archives are defined as documents which have been generated over the lifespan of an individual or business. They are defined (and therefore grouped) by their provenance rather than their subject matter, and the significance of individual items is enhanced through their relationship with the collection as a whole.

B) STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES

B1) Standards

This policy is underpinned by the relevant British Standards, namely:

BS4971 (2017) – Conservation and care of archive and library collections

BS (EN) 16893 (2017) – Conservation of Cultural Heritage

B2) Principles

IWCRO will aim to store archival material in suitable and secure accommodation with the appropriate environmental conditions. It will be guided in this by national standards and best practice addressing all aspects of collections care and conservation.

IOWCRO actively manages the risks to documents in its care and assesses new potential deposits at the time of accession to identify priorities for conservation.

The office also seeks to stabilise documents in its care following best practice and working with both the museum conservator working for the Isle of Wight Heritage Service and an external document conservator.

The Record Office aims to provide access to documents whilst still ensuring their protection and minimising handling.

IWCRO is a member of Archive First digital preservation working group and contributes to a digital preservation solution for archives based in the south of England.

IWCRO considers that the conservation of documents in its care to be the responsibility of all staff.

C) ACCOMODATION

C1) Accommodation Security

IWCRO aims to fulfil the requirements of BS4971 (2017).

The records are stored in a nineteenth century police house (with extensions), maintained by Isle of Wight Council Property Services. The building is secure and access to the strong rooms is controlled, with visitors or contractors accompanied in the strong rooms by archive staff.

The building is fitted with smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers are available throughout the building. Isle of Wight Council ensures that this equipment is regularly inspected by suitable contractors.

C2) Environmental Control and Monitoring

Only one of the strong rooms has air-conditioning units installed, although the nature of the building means that a second strong room is partially environmentally controlled. The remaining four strong rooms are environmentally controlled only by radiators heated by gas central heating.

Temperature and humidity are monitored throughout the strong rooms and movements outside the appropriate guidance are reported to the Heritage Service conservator for advice.

Locations are clearly indicated by shelf and bay markers and a location guide is maintained.

C3) Packing and Storage

IWCRO recognises the importance of a safe and clean environment in the strong rooms as part of the care of collections. All storage areas are regularly checked for mould and other infestations and any problems referred to the Heritage Service conservator for advice.

The different types of records are stored on static shelving according to their requirements.

C4) Accessioning

Staff at IWCRO inspect any new deposits at the point of accession to identify potential risks to existing collections. These include items that present a fire risk (such as silver nitrate film) or a risk of infestation. Such items are referred to the Isle of Wight Heritage Service conservator for advice.

As part of this process, staff also ensure that items that items are packaged appropriately prior to cataloguing.

At this time, a note will also be made of any potential conservation needs in advance of cataloguing.

For further details of the Accessioning Process, see the Collection Information Policy.

D) REMEDIAL CONSERVATION

Items requiring conservation are identified during the accessioning process or as part of weekly staff meetings. Documents requiring conservation are prioritised depending on user demand, the context of the document within the collection and the physical condition of the document concerned. Documents are then passed to an external qualified conservator for assessment and advice on potential remedial work, which may include the creation of digital surrogates, accessible through terminals in the Record Office searchroom.

Conservation Reports from the external conservator are recorded on a second database once the work is complete.

E) ACCESS

E1) Search room

IWCRO makes catalogued archives available to all users in appropriately controlled and supervised conditions, and may produce uncatalogued material at the discretion of the archivist.

Access to these records is subject to statutory closure periods, the wishes of the depositor and the physical condition of the documents

IWCRO makes surrogate copies of original documents available wherever possible and encourages researcher to make use of these to minimise handling and the risk of damage to the original.

Pay-per-view providers offer high quality surrogates of name rich documents. At present, this facility is available free of charge at the Record Office, but only for a variety of national records (such as Census and Electoral records) but not for records generated on the Isle of Wight (except school admission registers).

All staff regularly receive training in the handling techniques, including in the use of book rests and weights, and will pass that knowledge on to researchers as necessary

In the event of a document not being produced or being closely monitored on the grounds of condition, users are encouraged to understand the reasoning behind the decision.

E2) Copying

Photocopying and scanning is carried out by members of staff, or volunteers under the supervision of an archivist, in the workroom, but the use of a camera or surrogate is encouraged in order to minimise the impact on documents.

For further details on access to documents and copying restrictions see the Access Policy, Collections Care and Conservation Plan and Search room Code of Conduct.

E3) Exhibitions

Long-term displays of original documents are discouraged and high quality surrogates offered as an alternative. Where original documents are used in a display, display cases are used. Additionally an environmental assessment is carried out in advance by the Heritage Service conservator.

F) DIGITAL

Staff at IWCRO are currently working with colleagues across the Isle of Wight Council, as well as fellow professionals across the southern region to draw up a strategy for the long-term preservation of digital material.

Currently, the readability of the data is assessed at the point of accession and then migrated to digital media storage.

G) DISASTER RECOVERY

IWCRO maintains a Disaster Plan in co-ordination with the rest of the Isle of Wight Heritage Service.

H) REVIEW

This policy was created in 2018 and will be reviewed in 2023 or sooner as appropriate.