

A photograph of the National Archives building in Washington, D.C. The building is a large, modern structure with a curved facade and a series of windows. In the foreground, there is a large fountain with several jets of water spraying upwards. The sky is clear and blue.

The National Archives

Preservation Policy

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Policy owner: Collection Care
Published: June 2018
Reviewed: June 2018

This policy was agreed with the Trade Union Side on 16th May 2018.
It will be reviewed at the request of either party.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out the principles according to which The National Archives (TNA) will preserve and care for its archival collections.
- 1.2 Under the Public Records Act of 1958, TNA is the custodian of the public record; with a mandate to preserve the government records transferred to it, ensure their authenticity and to provide public access.
- 1.3 Both physical and digital collections are preserved at TNA. The purpose is to preserve these collections for posterity, to retain authenticity and value, to facilitate access, and to protect TNA's current and future collections from risks such as, but not limited to, deterioration, damage, loss, corruption or obsolescence.
- 1.4 TNA assesses and manages risks to both the physical and digital collection as part of its risk management strategy and has carried out a preservation risk assessment exercise for the physical collection which is updated regularly to inform investment in mitigation strategies. For the digital collection, TNA is developing a robust and quantitative approach to modelling digital preservation risk as part of TNA's challenging [Digital Strategy](#).
- 1.5 This preservation policy takes account of all current standards, frameworks and requirements for Archive Accreditation. Please see Appendix A for a current list.
- 1.6 TNA recognises that the preservation needs of the collection must be balanced with a number of other factors such as the organisation's commitment to environmental sustainability ([Environmental Policy](#)), cost and the government's targets for reductions in carbon emissions.
- 1.7 This policy will be reviewed at least every five years and approved by TNA's Executive Team. Supporting policies and procedures will also be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

2 Security of the collection

- 2.1 TNA controls access to the collections to safeguard them from deliberate damage, alteration and loss.
- 2.2 The physical collections are stored securely at both the Kew site and offsite at DeepStore, in Cheshire. Admittance to all areas where collections are stored is controlled by access pass and is restricted to staff who require access to carry out their role. Staff access rights are regularly reviewed and an audit trail of use of the collection and access to storage areas is maintained. All staff have been security cleared, and there is a security presence on the Kew site 24 hours a day.
- 2.3 Collections of extraordinary importance or value, selected in line with TNA's internal Safe Room procedures, are provided with an additional level of security

through storage in the Safe Room. As well as additional fire protection, collections in the Safe Room are subject to added access restrictions and tighter usage procedures than collections in TNA's other storage areas.

- 2.4 The digital collections are preserved and managed in the Digital Records Infrastructure (DRI), TNA's digital preservation system. Access is limited to staff who carry out preservation activities and the DRI controls access permissions according to roles.

3 Collection storage

- 3.1 All collections are stored in environments designed and controlled to mitigate the risk of loss, damage or deterioration.
- 3.2 TNA provides environmentally controlled and monitored (temperature and relative humidity) storage for its physical collection both at the Kew site and DeepStore. At Kew, most storage areas are controlled to a seasonally variable set point, with specialist areas controlled to year-round set points for the photographic store and cool storage.
- 3.3 Storage areas are cleaned on a regular basis. Lighting in storage areas is controlled and the vast majority of collection items are boxed or otherwise enclosed using appropriate materials and packaging.
- 3.4 The risk of damage to the collection from pests is managed by implementing and maintaining an integrated pest management (IPM) programme within collection storage areas, consultation areas and display areas and educating transfer staff who oversee new accessions on the signs of pest activity.
- 3.5 TNA's Public Sector Film collection is stored in specialist storage conditions at the British Film Institute (BFI). Public access to and the preservation of this collection is managed in accordance with a Contractual Agreement between TNA and BFI.
- 3.6 Digital records are stored in the Dark Archive, a digital tape library. Three copies of each record are preserved with one copy sent to secure offsite storage, ensuring that the records can be recovered in the event of a disaster at TNA.

4 Collection production and access

- 4.1 TNA has a mandate to provide access to its archival collections whatever the format.
- 4.2 Public access to the physical collection is provided in TNA's reading rooms at Kew. To be able to order and view physical collection items, a Reader's Ticket is required. Training in appropriate handling is provided for staff and the public who access or use collection items. Records from the collection can be viewed by the public only in the Document Reading Room in sight of CCTV cameras and Reader Invigilators.

Policies are in place to support the removal of those who intentionally contribute to their deterioration, damage or loss. In some cases copies are offered in place of the physical original.

- 4.3 TNA is empowered by section 2(4)(g) of the Public Records Act 1958 to loan collection items for public exhibition. Prospective borrowers must meet all of TNA's [Conditions for Loans](#), and all requests for loans and internal display are reviewed to ensure document safety, security and integrity at all times during transport and display. Where there is reason for concern, the use of facsimiles is encouraged and the request for loan might be declined.
- 4.4 Public access to digital records (including digitised physical records) is provided via Discovery, an online catalogue and presentation system. They are available either in their original, or, where possible, in a more accessible format.

5 Collection management

- 5.1 TNA carries out a range of interventions designed to ensure that the archival record is maintained, carrying out research and adopting international best practice where appropriate.
- 5.2 Priority for interventive conservation treatment is given for the following purposes and work is scheduled as part of a departmental business plan:
- Display
 - Digitisation
 - Facilitation of access
 - Preventing potential loss
 - Improving knowledge of a collection item
- 5.3 All conservation treatments endeavour to balance minimum intervention with maximum retention of value and accessibility. TNA has an onsite Collections Care Department (CCD) and studios that provide preservation and conservation advice, guidance and treatments for TNA's physical collection. CCD maintains a collections database in which staff document the conservation treatments carried out and whether a collection item is known to require conservation treatment before it can be accessed.
- 5.4 All interventive conservation treatments carried out on collection items are conducted by qualified conservators or trainees/ technicians under the supervision of a qualified conservator in accordance with international best practice and the Institute of Conservation's (ICON) Professional Standards and Code of Conduct. Conservators employed by TNA are encouraged and supported to apply for and maintain Professional Accreditation of Conservators-Restorers (PACR).

- 5.5 Volunteers make an important contribution to the preservation of the collection by carrying out preventive conservation tasks and surveys. Volunteer projects are approved by TNA's User Participation Board and supervised by conservators or conservation technicians in accordance with [TNA's approach to user participation](#).
- 5.6 Research, scientific and technical examination, analysis and experimentation are used to maintain and improve the preservation and conservation treatment of the physical collection and enhance knowledge of the collection.
- 5.7 Preservation planning is a continual process carried out by the Digital Preservation Team. The team monitors changes that may impact on the sustainability of the digital records in their care. For example as file formats become obsolete records may be migrated to a different format to preserve their functionality while the original is also maintained. Regular fixity checks are carried out to ensure that the record's integrity is maintained so that once preserved the record is never altered.
- 5.8 The Digital Preservation Team keep abreast of the latest developments in the field through membership of professional organisations as well as more widely through regular liaison with the international digital preservation community. Developments in user needs and expectations may also result in different approaches to our activities.

6 Emergency planning

- 6.1 TNA mitigates the risk of damage and loss as far as possible. In the event of a disaster, recovery plans are in place to ensure that emergencies can be managed appropriately and collections restored.
- 6.2 Storage facilities at the Kew site and DeepStore are equipped with fire detection systems. The Kew site was built with flood defences in mind and there is limited collection material stored in the basement or ground floors of the building. TNA updates and maintains a Collections Emergency Plan that would be enacted in the event of an emergency impacting the collection and that links with other organisational emergency plans including Business Continuity and Major Incident Management plans. TNA regularly runs training and practice scenarios to support these plans.
- 6.3 Regular back-ups of the digital records are created and a copy is sent offsite to secure storage to ensure that the digital collections can be fully recovered in the event of an emergency.

7 Appendix – Relevant standards and frameworks

- 7.1 The following is a list of current standards and frameworks to which TNA endeavours to align its preservation practices, procedures and guidance. This list will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

- BS ISO 11799:2015 – Information and documentation – Document storage requirements for archive and library materials
- ISO/TR 19814:2017 – Information and documentation – Collections management for archives and libraries
- BS 4971:2017 – Conservation and care of archive and library collections
- BSI PAS 198:2012 – Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections
- The Institute of Conservation's Code of Conduct and Professional Standards
- BS ISO 14721:2012 – Space data and information transfer systems. Open archival information system (OAIS). Reference model
- BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections