



Collections Care and Conservation Plan

to 2018

Our Mission

The West Yorkshire Archive Service exists to preserve the past, serve the present and protect the future. We do this by collecting and looking after the unique documentary heritage of the region and by helping members of the public use and enjoy these records.

Preserving the past, serving the present, protecting the future

Our Vision

To provide a welcoming and engaging service that will inspire people to use the archives of West Yorkshire, enabling them to celebrate their identity and understand their past, present and future.

Aims

Collections care and conservation is a fundamental responsibility of West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS) and underpins the preservation of and access to our archives. This plan describes how we will put our Collections Care and Conservation Policy into practise by:

- improving the care of our collections over time;
- enhancing and prolonging the stability of our collections;
- identifying collections for remedial conservation or targeted preservation work.

Background

These collections care and conservation aims focus our plan on the following areas:

- maintaining and improving storage facilities and conditions;
- facilitating access to collections whilst minimising risks;
- strategically assessing and prioritising collections.

Unstable and vulnerable collections are a barrier to WYAS's aim of opening up access to the history of the region. In common with many established record offices in the UK, WYAS holds a proportion of material which may prevent or provide limited access for historical research due to their format or condition. New accessions of material also arrive continually, needing to be condition assessed and stabilised.

Agents of deterioration also present risks which must be assessed and managed to protect our collections.¹ Through our conservation and collections care activities we make collections stable, useable and safe for people to access. This improves both the quantity and quality of users' research and increases the longevity of the collections as resources for this.

This Collections Care and Conservation Plan takes a positive, pragmatic and, importantly, a flexible approach in order to maximise available resources for collections care and conservation.

¹ Agents of deterioration: physical forces; thieves and vandals; dissociation; fire; water; pests; pollutants; light; incorrect temperature and humidity.

Objectives

Our collections care and conservation aims are most effectively served by objectives which balance a “best for the most” with a “bespoke” approach. Simple but extensive cleaning or packaging programmes, or storage improvements, can have a broad and positive impact on a larger collection, whereas tailored treatments or bespoke enclosures can maximise protection for smaller collections or individual items when requirements such as display or searchroom access are priorities.

WYAS’s recent and ongoing focus is on large scale collections care improvement projects including cleaning, packaging and moving collections at WYAS Leeds, Wakefield and Calderdale.

The following objectives have been identified:

- increase the proportion of collections stored according to PD5454 guidance;
- improve energy efficiency;
- monitor environmental conditions for the majority of our collections remotely and in real time;
- increase and consolidate collections storage space;
- increase format based collections storage;
- increase the proportion of collections with appropriate packaging;
- review our disaster plan to incorporate recent changes in storage arrangements;
- facilitate timely access to collections for users;
- increase remedial conservation treatment on maps and plans;
- develop collections care awareness internally and externally.

Achieving our objectives

WYAS has identified eleven paths towards achieving our collections care and conservation aims.

PATH 1: Removal of collections to improved facilities

WYAS is experienced in large scale collections relocation to improve storage facilities:

- Central Archive Store (CAS) construction at WYJS Morley (2004);
- WYAS Bradford to Bradford Central Library (2006);
- WYAS Leeds to WYJS Morley (2012);
- WYAS Wakefield to West Yorkshire History Centre (WYHC, 2016);
- WYAS Leeds Nortech store to CAS at WYJS Morley (2016).

We will continue to initiate and support projects to upgrade our collections storage and access facilities, specifically at WYAS Calderdale and Kirklees.

In 2017 we will move the WYAS Calderdale collections to the new Halifax Central Library. This will provide extended storage space, format based storage, Inergen fire suppression and improved air handling (current air handling systems are now failing to provide consistent PD5454 recommended conditions). As the air handling system will now be independent of the main library system, we will also evaluate our maintenance options. Direct WYAS control may be more effective in the provision of sustained, optimum and economical environmental conditions. We will also install independent telemetric environmental monitoring sensors to enable remote access to live data and expedite our responses to any issues.

Collections will all be packaged, condition checked and barcoded as required prior to removal.

We will seek funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in partnership with Huddersfield University to create a new storage facility for WYAS Kirklees collections on the University Campus. These are currently housed in Huddersfield Central Library and a shared library out-store, Red Doles which does not cater for PD5454 recommended conditions or facilities.

As the first stage of the application process has recently been successful, the project partnership will now develop its bid for the funding required. This will include more detailed work on surveying collections care and conservation needs, particularly those at Red Doles which present challenges in format and packaging.

PATH 2: Improvement/maintenance of environmental conditions in existing facilities

WYAS collections located in Bradford, Wakefield, Calderdale and the CAS at Morley benefit from air handling systems which currently control the environmental conditions within PD5454 recommended parameters.

Maintaining appropriate conditions provided by air handling at our autonomous facilities (WYHC and CAS) will continue to be achieved in partnership with our facilities management partners at Bradford MDC who will also advise on, schedule, monitor and manage buildings maintenance matters affecting the storage and access areas where required.

For example at WYHC Wakefield we will improve the energy efficiency of the air handling as the building continues to dry out post construction (May 2016), and at the CAS, Morley where the air handling plant is now 13 years old, we will research and cost succession planning for its future replacement or refurbishment to sustain suitable conditions into the future.

The use of external service providers to remotely monitor the Building Management Systems at both sites and combining this input with our own environmental monitoring data will inform any action required.

We will also seek an integrated information management solution (such as a proprietary database) to help us more effectively monitor and manage our buildings management arrangements and activities.

At our facilities shared on a rental basis (Halifax and Bradford Central Libraries), we will continue to ensure maintenance of and accountability for our required environmental conditions via the site facilities management teams.

Bradford Library has recently overhauled its air handling system and we will monitor the strongroom conditions in anticipation of greater consistency and reduced humidity levels.

The WYAS Leeds store does not consistently provide PD5454 recommended environmental conditions, therefore we will mitigate elevated humidity levels by the local use of fans and dehumidifiers. We will pursue a longer term solution to this issue by seeking advice and costs regarding potential air handling options.

PATH 3: Surveys, assessment and collections prioritisation

Assessment tools such as Benchmarks in Collections Care (BiCC), Preservation Assessment Surveys (PAS), hazard risk assessment matrices and analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threat (SWOT) will be used to evaluate collection care issues within our various service areas and storage locations.

BiCC assessments will be used to table the improvements achieved at WYAS, Wakefield since the removal of the collections from the Registry of Deeds in 2016 as well as at WYAS Calderdale in late 2017.

Preservation Assessment Surveys are also planned at WYAS Kirklees as the next district collections care and conservation priority for WYAS. These will direct any specific surveys required such as those relating to packaging, cleaning and format storage requirements in preparation for an HLF bid and future collection removals.

Collections prioritisation for work such as cleaning, remedial conservation work or packaging will be undertaken in consultation with the district archivists to consider access needs and future cataloguing work. The Calm catalogue will be used to target particular formats such as maps and plans which the Conservation Studio is now better equipped to treat.

PATH 4: Volunteers

WYAS has an established history of working with volunteers. Between 2011 and 2016 volunteers helped the conservation team with the packaging of around 10,000 items in preparation for the removal of the WYAS Wakefield collections to WYHC. We will establish a new volunteering regime at WYHC to help carry out cleaning and packaging work on collections identified in consultation with the relevant district archivist and the Audience Engagement and Learning Coordinator.

PATH 5: Collections first aid

We will make collection items safe to access without causing damage by using appropriate measures such as cleaning, packaging, supports or reprographics. We have recently tailor-made new, improved book cushions for the searchroom at WYHC and will make these available at other offices. We will also extend our provision of imaging equipment such as overhead cameras (currently available at WYHC and WYAS Leeds) and book cradles (WYHC), to help safely image collection items for access.

WYAS Conservation staff are available for consultation on collections care and conservation matters by the staff and public at WYHC in Wakefield where the Conservation Studio is based.

Members of the public are required to order research material in advance of their visit at WYHC and WYAS Leeds, which means access issues can be flagged up via the catalogue or visual inspection by staff. Items which are too fragile to use without damage will be noted as “unfit for production” in the catalogue, withheld from the searchroom and may be prioritised and flagged on Calm for interventive treatment.

Conservation staff will also make regular visits to other WYAS offices to provide advice and carry out surveys, environmental monitoring and pest checks. We will also take advantage of technology such as mobile phone cameras and Skype to increase accessibility of staff and the public to conservation expertise.

New collections may present collections care and conservation issues. Our priority is to prevent new material adversely affecting or infesting our existing collections by introducing pests or mould for example. We will assess new collections to limit the risk of this and where possible liaise with depositors in advance to help prevent problems. We will physically quarantine and freeze at-risk material at WYHC if necessary.

PATH 6: Training

We will review our disaster plan and carry out a service-wide training session for archive staff at WYHC to enhance our preparedness in the event of an emergency affecting the collections. Conservation staff will also provide practical guidance to staff, in particular relating to recognising problems such as mould and insect infestations, as well as simple preservation measures such as packaging.

Professional development of staff in relation to collections care and conservation will be supported in a number of ways:

- WYAS subsidised membership of relevant professional organisations such as the Archives and Records Association and the Institute of Conservation;
- our Conservation Technician will be supported and subsidised to undertake the Conservation Collections Care Technician’s Diploma directed by the Victoria and Albert Museum;

- our Conservator will be supported and subsidised to undertake Professional Accreditation for Conservator-Restorers

PATH 7: Collections Care Projects

These are distinct conservation and preservation projects, led by WYAS's professional conservators. Given the funding bid to the HLF for a new building for WYAS Kirklees and the removal of the WYAS Calderdale collections to a new library building, the focus of preservation projects will be these two districts. We will complete a current cleaning project of WYAS Calderdale collections in 2017 prior to their removal.

PATH 8: Collections Weeks – Local Authority Archives

WYAS holds very numerous and sizeable local authority archives, which are often housed in out-stores. Due to the size and location of this material, and the need to maintain our public opening hours, it can be difficult to organise and package the material without setting aside specific blocks of time. WYAS will therefore continue to seek permission for the closure of public searchrooms for two weeks during each calendar year (usually in March and November). Such 'collections weeks' are conceived as an opportunity to make a concerted and coordinated effort towards improving the documentation and preservation of local authority archives.

PATH 9: External Funding Bids

Some collections are sufficiently large or complex to prohibit their conservation within our existing resources. We will seek opportunities for grant funding to enable us to undertake these larger scale conservation projects, in particular targeting collections which may take advantage of the new conservation facilities at WYHC, such as the large document sink and map repair wall.

PATH 10: Collections care and conservation promotion

The collections are the basis of any archive service and much skill, training and experience go into preserving and conserving them. Collections care promotion will form part of a wider WYAS strategy as directed by the Audience Engagement and Learning Coordinator.

The Conservation team will also run public workshops on collections care related topics, work on collections on public view in the WYHC studio, provide collections care advice to the public, train volunteers in basic conservation skills and improve the information on collections care accessible to our users via a new website, interpretation panels at WYHC and social media.

PATH 11: Born-Digital Collections

Records once created as hard copy are now being created on computer and may only exist in a digital format. Ever changing technology means the challenge to capture and

permanently preserve these records is ongoing. What makes something worthy of permanent preservation is governed by its content and not by its format. The techniques, however, involved in managing digital material are very different from traditional archives. A professional member of staff has been given the responsibility of progressing our digital preservation work to ensure that these records are being preserved, made accessible and integrated with our traditional catalogues.

Standards

All current WYAS collections care and conservation activity is informed by the standards and frameworks listed in our Collections Care and Conservation Policy.

Review Date

This plan covers the period up to 2018 and will be reviewed and updated in early 2019.