Collections Information Policy

1. **Introduction**

Northumberland Archives (then Northumberland Record Office) was established in 1958 'to take charge of the official County Archives and to provide a place of deposit for other local records relating to Northumberland'. Our branch office in Berwick-upon-Tweed opened in 1990 with a remit to collect records relating to the geographical area then served by Berwickupon-Tweed Borough Council. Our Collection Policy Statement defines the principles by which Northumberland Archives acquires and collects archive material relating to the county of Northumberland across both service points Documentation underpins every aspect of collections activity. Recording information about our collections is essential to ensuring that we are accountable for our collections; that we ensure the security of our collections; that all legal obligations are met and that we offer the widest possible access to our collections.

2. **Policy Aims**

The aim of our policy is to set out the history of our documentations systems and ensure that for each collection in our custody:

- there is an accurate record in our electronic Accessions Register.
- there is an Accession Number that uniquely identifies that collection within the Accession Register entry.

• there is a Reference Number that uniquely identifies that collection within the Accession Register and the Catalogue Record.
• that the Reference Number is labelled or otherwise suitably marked on the packaging of the collection or where fully catalogued on the items that make up the collection.
• that any access restrictions on a collection or any part of it are clearly identified.
• that all documentation relating to a collection can be easily located and is accessible.
• that an accurate and up to date record of the location of the collection is maintained.

3. History of Our Documentation Systems

1. From the establishment of Northumberland Archives in 1958 to 1995 accession information – date of deposit, brief description of collections, status of collection (deposit, gift or purchase), accession number and reference number and name and address of depositor were recorded manually in two accession registers. This information has been transferred into CALM – our electronic collections management system – but requires some editing – some data does not meet our current recording conventions.

2. Between 1958 and 1990 catalogue lists were compiled manually and subsequently type-written. At this point there was no internal guidelines around cataloguing standards and as a consequence many of the lists created in this period do not meet ISAD(G) standards. As these older catalogue lists are added to our electronic catalogue this is being addressed.

3. Between 1990 and 2002 catalogue lists were word-processed and at this point there was some standardisation. Some of these word-processed catalogue lists have been uploaded to CALM but there remains further work to be undertaken on this.

4. In 2001-2002 Northumberland Archives participated in the Access To Archives [A2A] project that allowed the retro-conversion of catalogue lists to electronic format. Catalogue lists submitted to this project were largely of business and estate collections. These catalogue lists now form part of The National Archives 'Discovery' catalogue and are fully searchable from http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk. Upon completion of the project Northumberland Archives was provided with EAD copies of files created in the A2A project. Some of these files have been uploaded into our CALM catalogue and in some instances editing of these files is required.

5. In 2002 Northumberland Archives acquired CALM – an off the shelf electronic collections management system. From this point accession and catalogue data has been inputted directly into CALM and guidance around accessioning and cataloguing was drawn together into our CALM Manual.

4. Voucher (Accession) Files

1. A voucher (accession) file is created for each new collection deposited. A new file is set up by marking one of the pre-established blank files with the accession number allocated. From late 2023 voucher files have been created and stored digitally.

2. A standard file should contain a blank receipt – to be completed at the point that the collection is accepted into our custody – and a voucher file progress sheet. Mandatory fields in the latter are accession number; reference number; date that accession, depositor and catalogue links are created in CALM and initials of staff member undertaking this; date that paper copy of electronic receipt is generated and initials of staff member undertaking this; date that letters accompanying receipt and/or lists are generated and initials of staff member undertaking this; date that collection is catalogued and by whom; details of dates that receipt, catalogue list and any other paperwork is sent out to deposit and by whom; details of catalogue list distribution and by whom and details of any indexing of collection.

3. Copies of any subsequent correspondence with the depositor or concerning the collection should be filed on the voucher file.

4. A voucher file exists for each collection deposited. From this a staff member ought to be able to track the history of the collection from the time it came into our care and in some instances possible prior to this. Information on some of the early voucher files can be a little sparse.

5. Receipts

1. A Receipt Form is issued at the point that a collection is accepted into our custody. This is a proforma with the following mandatory fields – accession number; reference number; date of deposit; collection title; depositor details (name, address, telephone number and e-mail address); owner details – if different from depositor details; deposit type (deposit, gift, loan, statutory transfer, purchase or bequest); brief description of and history of collection; physical condition (good, fair or poor) and comment on status or provenance. The receipt is signed by depositor and staff member at point of deposit. On the rare occasion that a collection is received by post receipt is filled out at point of accession and depositor requested to sign it.

2. Terms of deposit are printed on the reverse of the receipt and are explained to the depositor. Any agreed variations to the terms of deposit are recorded in the box at the end of the terms.

3. Information on the receipt is used to create the accession record in CALM. Historically, The paper copy was then filed on the voucher (accession) file. The creation of digital voucher files means that any paper receipts are now scanned and added to the digital file. Two second copies of the receipt are then generated from the information in CALM – one to be added to the voucher file and the other to be sent to the depositor.

6. Accession Record In CALM

1. Shortly after deposit, information from the following fields in the paper receipt form are added to CALM – accession number; reference number; date of deposit; depositor name, address, telephone number and e-mail

address; owner details if different; deposit type; title of collection and brief description of collection.

2. The following additional CALM fields are populated at the same time - extent (cubic meterage) and cataloguing priority. Written guidance around the latter is available in the document Cataloguing Prioritisation Scheme.

3. Information about collections held at both service points – Berwick and Woodhorn is inputted to the same accessions database thereby allowing staff members to undertake searches across deposits at both repositories.

4. Accession information is then linked to the catalogue record as per the guidance in our Cataloguing Manual.

5. Basic accession information from the paper accessions registers has been manually data inputted into CALM. This provides basic information about each collection but requires editing and additional information added, for example, around cataloguing priority, to bring it to the standard of information concerning recent deposits.

7. Depositor Record In CALM.

1. Contact details of depositors are recorded in the depositor database of CALM at time of accession. This information is subject to Data Protection legislation and will not be shared with other organisations/individuals.

2. Depositor details are updated as soon as any new information is received.

3. Depositor information about early deposits is recorded in the manual accession registers. This has been manually data inputted into the CALM depositors' database but requires some editing.

4. Depositor information is linked to the accession record in CALM at point of accessioning.

8. Catalogue Record

1. Collections are catalogued in accordance with the priority attributed to the collection at point of accession.

2. Classification schemes have been developed for many of the classes of record in our care. Where a scheme does not exist one is created as required.

3. Collections are catalogued to at least the minimum mandatory elements of International Council on Archives, General International Standard of Archival Description ISAD(G).

4. At collection level the following fields are mandatorily populated – level, repository, reference number, accession number, extent, title, date, description, management group, management sub-group and where applicable access conditions. It is also expected that some detail of administrative and custodial history is recorded.

5. Guidance on cataloguing different formats of document is provided in our Cataloguing Manual.

9. Appraisal of Records

1. Our current practice is to appraise records at point of accession where this is practically possible. This is undertaken in accordance with our Archives Appraisal Policy.

2. Appraisal decisions are recorded on an Appraisal Record Sheet which is subsequently placed on the relevant voucher file. Historically appraisal decisions were not formally recorded and in such cases, it is not possible to trace appraisal decisions made on collections.

3. Appraisal decisions are also recorded in the relevant field of our CALM accession record.

10. Indexing of Collections

1. CALM allows free text searching of catalogue content. Because of this we only record index terms at the collection level of CALM catalogue records.

2. UKAT Archival Thesaurus terms have been uploaded into CALM and terms are selected from this list.

3. Within our searchrooms at Berwick and Woodhorn there are filing drawers of index cards – place, person and subject. Collections were indexed in this way from the establishment of our service until the introduction of CALM. Catalogue lists of some of the collections indexed in this way have not been retro-converted and the index cards remain a useful tool for users.

11.Closure Periods

1. Northumberland Archives collections include records that are subject to certain access restrictions. These restrictions may be determined by Data Protection legislation, advice and guidance from The National Archives and the Information Commissioner's Office or imposed by the depositor.

2. Generally access restrictions are recorded in searchroom catalogues and/or our CALM catalogue. Users are made aware of access restrictions and the reasons that they are in place.

3. Written guidance around closure periods is provided for staff.

4. Documented procedures advising users of the steps necessary to gain access to particular classes of restricted records are in place.

12. Cataloguing Backlog.

1. In common with most Local Authority Archive Services Northumberland Archives has a substantial cataloguing backlog. Our backlog is defined as collections that are uncatalogued. In addition, there are a number of older collections that are not well catalogued and would have a higher usage if they were re-catalogued to modern standards.

2. Resources have not allowed us to undertake a collection wide LOGJAM survey. In 2023 we used LOGJAM to assess resources required to catalogue a substantial solicitor’s collection in our care with a view to obtaining external funding for this project. We would look to undertake a wider LOGJAM survey in the future.

3. Historically, we maintained a spreadsheet on which we recorded the state of collections. This allowed us to record cataloguing status of all collections accessioned from 2007. Information recorded allowed staff to easily ascertain whether collections have been catalogued, indexed, digitised, whether old format lists have been uploaded into CALM and lists circulated as appropriate. The spreadsheet does include information about collections accessioned prior to the date spreadsheet was established but this is generally less comprehensive. Separate spreadsheets are held for both service points.

13. Access To Catalogues

1. Where a digital version of a catalogue list has been created this is available either via our online catalogue or in some cases via Discovery – see point 3.4.

2. Many of the digitally created catalogue lists have been printed and are available to consult in our searchrooms at Berwick and Woodhorn.

3. Copies of the majority of older manually generated catalogue lists are available to consult in our searchrooms at Berwick and Woodhorn.

14. Locations Spreadsheets

1. Shelf locations are recorded manually at the point that collections are placed in the strongrooms at both service points.

2. This information is then entered into our locations spreadsheets. Separate spreadsheets are retained for collections held at Berwick and Woodhorn.

3. All locations spreadsheets are stored on our network and are regularly backed up.

15. Loans

1. From time-to-time items from our collections are loaned out to depositors or external organisations. All loans are recorded on a Loans Out Form, details of which are recorded on our Loans Spreadsheet. Follow-up dates are recorded in the spreadsheet.

2. Occasionally we borrow items often for digitisation and return to owners. All such loans are recorded on a Loans In Form, details of which are also recorded on our Loans Spreadsheet.

16. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years, and if appropriate, amended to maintain its relevance.

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