



CATALOGUING PRIORITISATION SCHEME

A. Introduction

Each year Northumberland Archives receives a large number of new deposits of records – in 2023-2024 we received 138 accessions at our primary service point at Woodhorn and a further 96 accessions at our Berwick-upon-Tweed office. Accessions can range in extent from a single item to hundreds of boxes. Ideally, we would catalogue all records as soon as or shortly after deposit. However, in common with most Local Authority Archive Services we have limited resources to expend on cataloguing records and must prioritise those collections that we are able to catalogue promptly.

B. Our Cataloguing Prioritisation Scheme

Several years ago, we developed a Cataloguing Prioritisation Scheme to formalise our approach to assessing records for cataloguing at point of deposit. This scheme is based on several criteria that are set out in the table below:

Criteria	Rationale
Access Restrictions	Some collections have access restrictions. These generally relate to Data Protection – personal information about named individuals. Where this is the case records are usually closed for 100 years. Such collections are generally NOT allocated a HIGH cataloguing priority.
Accruals	We receive a large number of accruals – additions to existing collections. Where the original collection is catalogued generally we would seek to catalogue the accrual as HIGH priority. Receipt of an accrual may also prompt us to catalogue a previously uncatalogued earlier deposit.

Anticipated demand by users	We consider what the likely demand by users is. This may be based on experience – for example we know that there will be a high public demand for collections including church registers. We keep statistics and other information on usage of documents and use this information to assess which classes of records are most widely used by our users. If we know that a collection is likely to be widely used, we are likely to give this collection a HIGHER priority than a collection that we consider will be little-used.
Complexity of collection	Some collections are very complex. Examples of this are collections that include a large quantity of documents written in Latin or another language other than English; they may be written in an early hand; they may need a great deal of sorting to put them into an order etc. Where this is the case we consider the amount of time likely to be required to catalogue this collection in relation to the amount of available cataloguing time.
Historical Importance	We consider the historical importance of each deposit. If the collection is considered to be particularly significant we are likely to allocate it HIGH priority. We would also consider the topicality of the collection. As an example, in 2016 we undertook cataloguing work on a number of collections relating to World War One. This work was made possible due to an HLF grant – one of our strategies around cataloguing extensive collections is to seek external funding – see below.
Ownership Status	Records come into our custody as a gift, deposit (long-term loan) or very occasionally by purchase. This ownership status is one of the criteria we use to assess priority.
Physical Condition	Some collections come into our custody in poor physical condition. This may mean that they are not able to be accessed by users in their current state. Where this is the case we are likely to allocate a LOW cataloguing priority until we are able to have the records conserved/repared. Once this has been achieved this cataloguing priority is likely to change.
Size	Resource levels mean that we are unlikely to be in a position to catalogue an extensive new deposit. It is therefore unlikely that such a collection will initially be designated HIGH priority. However, we do try to source external funding to catalogue extensive new deposits of records and to catalogue extensive collections that form part of our cataloguing backlog – see

	below.
Statutory Obligations	We consider whether there are any statutory obligations relating to the collection. For example, there may be a statutory right to access to minutes of Northumberland County Council or other organisations. Where this is the case these records will be allocated a HIGH priority.

C. Small Collections

Each time we take an item or collection into our care we record basic details about it into our CALM software programme. This process is known as accessioning. If the collection is small in extent, (20 items or less), cataloguing usually takes place at the same time as the accessioning process, regardless of priority level.

D. Extensive Collections

We seek to find external funding to support the cataloguing of extensive collections that we are unable to catalogue using core resource. Some of the collections that have been catalogued using external funds are listed below:

Date	Collection	Funding Source
2002	Records of Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne [SANT].	HLF – Archives For All
2007-2009	Records of the Diocese of Newcastle.	HLF - Access to Northumberland's History
2010	Carr-Ellison [Hedgeley] papers.	Private source
2010-2012	Butler [Ewart] papers. Lord Crewe Charity papers. Roddam [Roddam] papers.	HLF – Working Lives
2013-2016	Records of Stannington Sanatorium.	Wellcome Trust
2023	Clayton [Chesters] papers.	Green Rigg Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund
2024	Atkinson & Marshall papers.	Strathmartine

Northumberland Archives staff are happy to discuss our Cataloguing Prioritisation Scheme with depositors and users.

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