

Preservation Policy

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Purpose	3
3. Security	4
4. Storage.....	5
5. Production and Access	5
6. Collection Management.....	6
7. Emergency Planning.....	7
Appendix A – Relevant Standards and Frameworks.....	8

Policy owner: Head of Preservation & Access

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The archives of Parliament are a rich and exciting resource for exploring local, national and international history from the fifteenth century to the present day. The collections provide an unparalleled window into Parliament itself, including its architecture, administration and functions.
- 1.2 The Parliamentary Archives enables current and future generations to access unique documentary evidence and research its history by collecting, preserving and making accessible relevant digital and physical records of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Parliamentary Digital Service (PDS). By maintaining a record of past actions and decisions the Archives also supports the wider openness and transparency agenda, and act as Parliament's long-term memory.
- 1.3 This policy is part of a suite of policies which direct and inform the acquisition, preservation and management of, and access to collections, including:
 - Parliamentary Information Management Policy
 - Authorised Records Disposal Practice
 - Collections Development Policy
 - Collections Information Policy
 - Access Policy

The policy also supports the implementation of Parliament's Information and Data Strategy.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The preservation and care of Parliament's archival collections is a core business function of the Parliamentary Archives. Preservation ensures that collections are protected from risks, including, but not limited to, deterioration, damage, loss, corruption or obsolescence. It also ensures collections retain their authenticity and value and remain available for use both in the present and for future generations.
- 2.2 This policy provides the framework for the preservation of the archives of Parliament. It sets out the principles which guide our preservation activities. These are designed to mitigate the main risks and threats to the long-term survival and accessibility of the archives.
- 2.3 We have identified the main risks to collections as: security, storage, access and disaster/emergencies. This policy describes our mitigating actions in these areas, as well as our pro-active collections care, conservation and management activities.
- 2.4 This policy covers both physical and digital collections, as both formats are collected by the Parliamentary Archives.
- 2.5 This policy takes account of all current standards, frameworks. Please see Appendix A for a current list.

- 2.6 This policy will be reviewed at least every five years and approved by the Director of the Parliamentary Archives. Supporting policies and procedures will also be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

3. Security

- 3.1 The collections are stored in secure environments to protect them from deliberate damage, alteration and theft.
- 3.2 The physical collections are stored in the Victoria Tower, the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre (QEIIICC) and at an offsite storage facility. There is a security presence on the Parliamentary Estate 24 hours a day and Parliament's Security Department (PSD) controls access. Entry points to the Victoria Tower are controlled by access pass. The QEIIICC also have a security team who look after the building and access to storage areas is controlled by a reception team, a pass checking process and pass controlled access points. The offsite facility is a secure site, we have our own designated storage area which is controlled by access pass and is restricted to staff who require access to carry out their role.
- 3.3 Everyone who works on the Parliamentary Estate or has a network account has been security cleared and pass access permissions to the Victoria Tower are limited to Archives staff. PSD control access to and ensure centrally stored keys and passes are scanned/signed out. Staff access rights to the Victoria Tower and QEIIICC are regularly reviewed and the Director of the Archives gets regular reports on which passes have tried to access the Tower. The Archives team maintain an audit trail of collections use and retrievals.
- 3.4 Facilities and maintenance staff and contractors who require access to the storage areas are given induction training by the Collection Care team. They check in with the Archives team first, sign keys in and out and are admitted to the Victoria Tower by Archives staff who can monitor the access points via CCTV. Project staff and contractors undertaking works first get agreement from the Director of the Archives and are escorted in the storage spaces, either by members of the Facilities team who have been trained and inducted by the Archives, or by Archives staff themselves.
- 3.5 Collections of extraordinary importance or value are stored under separate security arrangements. Relevant staff are aware of the appropriate security procedures and regular checks are conducted.
- 3.6 The digital collections are preserved and managed by the Archives' Digital Preservation team, who manage Parliament's Digital Repository. The Parliamentary Digital Service (PDS) and the Cyber Security team are responsible for protecting Parliamentary systems from cyber attack. Access rights and permissions to perform certain activities (ingest, preservation and admin and maintenance) are controlled using groups which are managed by the Senior Archivist (Digital Preservation), supported by PDS.
- 3.7 All digital material transferred to the Parliamentary Archives undergoes virus checking at set intervals before it is stored in the digital repository.

4. Storage

- 4.1 All collections are stored in environments designed and controlled to mitigate the risk of loss, damage or deterioration.
- 4.2 Storage areas have very early warning fire detection systems, compartmentalisation, smoke detectors, emergency lighting and signage. There is no fire suppression system.
- 4.3 Environmentally (temperature and relative humidity) controlled and monitored storage is used for the physical collections in both the Victoria Tower and offsite storage. The QEIIICC storage area is stable and monitored and collections are being prepared to move from there to offsite storage in 2021.
- 4.4 All storage areas are cleaned on a regular basis.
- 4.5 Lights in storage rooms are kept off unless the room is in use and the majority of collections are boxed or otherwise enclosed using appropriate materials and packaging.
- 4.6 An integrated pest management (IPM) programme is in operation in the collection storage areas, to minimise the risk of damage to the collection from pests. Consultation and display areas are part of a Parliament-wide IPM programme and receive extra attention from Archives and housekeeping staff. The Archives' Collection Care team run sessions for Archives staff on IPM and all staff on the wider Parliamentary Estate are educated and encouraged to report on signs of pest activity.
- 4.7 Air pollutants and dust particles are managed through a central air filtration system subject to regular maintenance.
- 4.8 Digital collections are stored and mirrored on a combination of different storage technologies which are connected to the Digital Repository. Different storage technologies are used depending on the requirements for the type of data, its sensitivity, access status and use. Any third-party storage is supplied by multiple providers, and is accredited by Parliament's Assurance Working Group and managed by Parliament's Digital Service (PDS) with non-concurrent contracts.
- 4.8 For digital collections, bitstream preservation, including regular fixity checks, ensures that the record's integrity is maintained so that once preserved the record is never altered.

5. Production and Access

- 5.1 Enabling access to and use of Parliament's archival collections, regardless of their format, is a core business function of the Parliamentary Archives. To minimise damage to collections from handling and use, a number of mitigating actions are in place.
- 5.2 Public access to the physical collections is provided in the search room in the Palace of Westminster. In order to view records, users are required to complete a registration form, and sign to undertake to abide by search room rules. The search room is invigilated by Archives staff and also monitored by CCTV.

- 5.3 The Collection Care Team provide regular training and advice on handling collections for staff. There is written and pictorial guidance on handling and records supports for users in the search room and the Collection Care team are available to give one to one handling advice and assistance if needed.
- 5.4 Policies are in place to support the withdrawal of access rights for those who intentionally contribute to collections' deterioration, damage or loss.
- 5.5 For some records, access restrictions are in place: for example requests to view the originals of vulnerable collections are at discretion of Archives staff and may be denied or only enabled with Collection Care support. Alternatively, only the digitised copies of some collections may be available.
- 5.6 The Archives organises temporary internal exhibitions and also loans collection items for public exhibition to external organisations (e.g. museums, galleries, archives and libraries). Prospective borrowers are required to meet all of Parliament's conditions for loans, which include commitments to environmental and security conditions.
- 5.7 Prior to both internal exhibitions and external loans, condition assessments and digitisation of collections is undertaken, and the condition assessments are used to compare and re-condition assess when documents come off display or return from loan. Suitable mounts and display stands are provided by the Collection Care team.
- 5.8 Public access to open digital records (including digital surrogates) is provided via Parliament's Digital Repository public presentation system and the Archives' online catalogue. User access is restricted to presentation copies. Digital records may be made available in their original format or another format accessible using current technology.
- 5.9 Requests for access to closed digital records for internal users are managed by providing read only copies on a restricted internal platform, with authorisations from the appropriate person in the depositing office.

6. Collection Management

- 6.1 The Archives employs qualified conservators and archivists, trainees and technicians ensures staff retain and develop their expertise through continued learning and development, and professional memberships and accreditation. Staff carry out a range of activities, following standards, ethics and best practice where appropriate, in order to maintain and preserve all collections.
- 6.2 Prioritisation of physical collections for conservation and preservation is decided as part of annual business planning activity and depends on the availability of staff and resources. Priority is given to collections for the following purposes:
- Acquisition
 - Exhibition/display/loan
 - Digitisation
 - Enabling access
 - Preventing potential loss
 - Improving knowledge of a collection item
 - Moves

- 6.3 All conservation and preservation activities are undertaken to appropriate professional standards, fully documented, and endeavour to balance minimum intervention with maximum retention of value and accessibility.
- 6.4 The Collection Care team have suitable studios, equipment and materials and provide preservation and conservation advice, guidance and treatments for the physical collection. The team document the conservation treatments carried out.
- 6.5 Since 2018, the Collection Care team have been supporting a project which has been preparing and packing the Archives' collections for a move. Thanks to the surveys and assessments which have been carried out, more is known about which collections require treatment and the Collections Management system is being developed to record this information.
- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 Preservation planning is a continual process carried out by the Digital Preservation Archivists. The team monitors risks that may impact on the sustainability of the digital records in their care. These may include threats to the usability of the record - 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.
- 6.8 The Archives is a member of the Digital Preservation Coalition and the Digital Preservation Team stay up to date with the latest developments in their field through regular liaison with the international digital preservation community.

7. Emergency Planning

- 7.1 Parliament mitigates the risk of damage and loss to its collections as far as possible. The Parliamentary Estate, offsite storage and QEIIICC are equipped with fire detection systems and Parliament has a dedicated onsite Fire Safety Team and conducts regular practice exercises with London fire brigade.
- 7.2 The Victoria Tower and offsite store are not at risk of flooding and the QEIIICC storage areas are regularly checked.
- 7.3 In the event of a disaster or emergency Parliament has an Incident Management Team and Framework and organisation-wide and departmental business continuity plans to ensure incidents are managed appropriately. The Incident Management Emergency Call Cascade is tested regularly.
- 7.4 Disaster recovery and salvage plans for all Parliament's Heritage Collections are in place to ensure that collections are salvaged and restored where possible. The Archives and the House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries share a contract with Harwell Restoration Services and Parliament-wide heritage collections salvage and disaster preparedness is led by a Heritage Resilience Co-ordinator role and Heritage Incident Management Group on which all of Parliament's Collections teams are represented.

- 7.5 The Archives' Disaster Control and Salvage Plan is maintained and developed by the Collection Care Manager and salvage equipment and materials are regularly checked and reviewed. Salvage training sessions for staff are run at least annually and include equipment familiarisation and storage space orientation sessions as well as table-top exercises, sometimes with the Incident Management or Fire Team.
- 7.6 PDS maintain an emergency plan for IT systems and infrastructure, which forms part of the strategy for safeguarding digital content, systems and collections.
- 7.7 Storage for digital collections is mirrored, meaning that each digital record is stored in multiple locations, on storage platforms provided by multiple suppliers. This ensures that the loss of one storage technology or the failure of a storage provider is not catastrophic.

Appendix A – Relevant Standards and Frameworks

The Parliamentary Archives refers to the below list of current standards and frameworks to decide 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 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
- BS ISO 14721:2012 – Space data and information transfer systems. Open archival information system (OAIS). Reference model