

National Waterways Archive: Policy Statement

1. Mission

We preserve and provide access to a large and diverse collection of records which evidence how waterways transform Britain, both in the past and the present. We aim to raise awareness of their significance as primary source material evidencing both known and unknown histories of Britain's canals and waterways.

2. Repository and Governing body

This Policy Statement relates to the National Waterways Archive ('the Archive'), a physical repository located in a building forming part of the site of the National Waterways Museum, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 4FW, with ARCHON National Repository Number 1140 owned by Canal & River Trust (the 'Trust').

3. Purpose

This Policy Statement sets out:

The legislative context for **Collections Development** and defines the basis on which the Archive acquires or does not acquire records.

How the Archive document holdings via **Collections Information**. How Trust colleagues capture this information and make it available to the public via accessioning and cataloguing.

Overall collections management at the Archive and covers **Access, Collections Care and Conservation** and **Digital Preservation**.

4. Collections Development

Scope:

- Internal acquisitions:
 - Records transferred from the Records Management function of the Trust



- Records transferred from other persons, offices, depots or holdings under the legal jurisdiction of the Trust
- External acquisitions:
 - Records offered by individual members of the public with no current legal affiliation with the Trust
 - Records offered by societies, bodies and/or other organisations with no current legal affiliation with the Trust
 - Records offered for transfer from a recognised heritage repository, including other archives, libraries and museums

5. Legislative Context

Collections development decisions will be made in compliance with the following legislation pertaining to the management, long-term preservation and provision of access to records and archives:

- Public Records Act [1958](#), [1967](#)
- Data Protection Act 2018. [Schedule 2. Part 6. 28](#). [Archiving in the public interest]
- Freedom of Information Act [2000](#)
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act [1988](#)

6. Acquisition Criteria

6.1 Geographical scope

6.1.1. Acquisitions must usually relate to the inland waterways of England and Wales in line with the geographical remit of the Trust. Records relating to inland navigations in Scotland may be directed to [Scottish Canals](#) and those relating to Northern Ireland and/or the Republic of Ireland may be directed to [Waterways Ireland](#).

6.1.2. Exceptions may be made for records created before the existence of the current geographical remit of the Trust and/or records relating to non-Trust waterways which form an indivisible part of a record series otherwise suitable for acquisition. Acquisitions relating to the inland and estuarial waterways of Great Britain that the Trust and/or its predecessors have owned, had an interest in, or had a close association with in the past, may be considered, on a case-by-case basis.

6.2 Primary sources

6.2.1. The Archive seeks to acquire authentic and reliable original records which are unique primary sources, created by organisations or persons in the course of their daily activities to document an activity or transaction. Such records will

demonstrate the qualities of integrity, authenticity and reliability and will contain information of evidential and/or historical value.

6.3 Secondary sources

6.3.1. Commercial and non-commercial publications, printed works and grey literature will be considered for acquisition if they form a minor and indivisible part of a record series otherwise suitable for acquisition.

6.4 Artificial collections

6.4.1. Collections of material consciously created, accumulated or otherwise formed with the purpose of bringing together information on a specific aspect of waterways history may be considered for acquisition only if:

- a sufficient quantity of the material adds information of significant value to existing knowledge of the history of the waterways
- the collection contains original research
- the collection contains original photographs

7. Acquisition Conditions / Limitations

Acquisition is a legal transaction which transfers ownership and custody of the acquisition to the Trust. For photographic material, transfer of copyright is preferred, except in exceptional circumstances, in addition to transfer of title.

7.1 The Archive will usually consider:

- Acquisitions offered as a gift
- Acquisitions with clear provenance
- Hard-copy manuscript format: parchment, paper, cloth etc.
- Hard-copy photographic format: prints, negatives, slides etc.
- Printed format
- Hard-copy film
- Born-digital material

7.2 The Archive will not usually accept:

- Records still in current or semi-current use
- Potentially hazardous material
- Duplicates in excess of 2 copies
- Copies of primary source material held elsewhere
- Photographs whose creator and/or copyright owner cannot be identified, unless they form a minor and indivisible part of a records series otherwise suitable for acquisition or unless they are accompanied by a significant number of photographs

whose creator/copyright owner can be identified and copyright ownership can be transferred to the Trust

- Artefacts / Works of art: these should be offered to the Trust's Collections team
- Records of a specialist nature not described above which require skills or equipment beyond the Archive's resources to secure, exploit or interpret, where long-term preservation cannot be guaranteed
- Records which require finance, storage, colleague time or expertise beyond the Archive's resources to catalogue, store and conserve, where long-term preservation cannot be guaranteed
- Acquisitions which do not conform to the Terms of Deposit regarding evidence of ownership and conditions of transfer of title (provenance)
- Loans, except for exhibition
- Archives offered for purchase. Donations are preferred unless in exceptional circumstances
- Material that is offered on the basis that it is to be closed for a long period as recommended by the depositor (with no legal justification ie. Data Protection, Freedom of Information or Public Records legislation) and therefore not available for research

8. Declined acquisitions

Where potential acquisitions are declined, the Archive will undertake to:

- Communicate the rationale for the decision to the prospective depositor;
- Advise the prospective depositor as to alternative suitable places of deposit, including other archives, museums or recognised cultural heritage institutions.

9. Depositor Liaison

Depositors are encouraged to contact the Archive team before making a deposit to the archives. They will be encouraged to give as much detail as possible about the provenance of the collection and its contents to inform cataloguing. If appropriate, box listing of the collection may be requested. Conservation and preservation needs of the collection are discussed at this point. Potential accruals are also discussed and recorded. Positive depositor liaison encourages partnership working and future donations from a diverse range of depositors to the Archive.

10. Collections Information

10.1 Accessioning

- 10.1.1. At the point of deposit the ownership status of all collections whether donation, deposit or bequest is recorded on an Object Entry Form, Terms of Deposit Agreement Form, transfer of copyright is recorded as necessary, and

the Accessions register. Depositor details are recorded which allows us to authenticate ownership and legal status of collections in the Archive's care.

10.1.2. Annual Accessioning Returns to The National Archives (TNA) record accessions and this information is made available to the public via TNA's website.

10.2 Appraisal and de-accessioning

10.2.1. The Archive shall have authority to transfer records to a more suitable repository if it is considered that the documents would benefit from relocation subject to the overriding principle that the integrity of archive collections shall be maintained as far as possible. The Depositor will be informed of any decision to transfer records.

10.2.2. Trust colleagues shall, in accordance with the wishes of the depositor, evaluate and dispose of documents deemed not worthy of permanent preservation, and the intention to do this shall be made clear at the time of transfer.

10.2.3. A full record of items which have been appraised or de-accessioned will be kept with the accession paperwork and also noted in the catalogue database: Collections Index.

10.3 Cataloguing

10.3.1. Cataloguing is at the core of the Archive's work to enable the effective management of collections and to provide public access to the widest possible audience via our online catalogue.

11. Cataloguing backlog

The Archive has collections which have not been catalogued and are in need of appraisal. If feasible, and under the guidance of the Archive team, Trust colleagues do allow researchers to view unlisted collections. Often accessions are requested after searching TNA accession to repositories information.

The Archive are responsive to user needs and increased requests for particular collections. These requests will be assessed by the Archive team and the collection included in the Collections Development area of the Forward Plan.

Internal and external funding will be sought to reduce the cataloguing backlog and TNA's LOGJAM survey will be used to inform decisions on priority collections. Plans to apply for funding for cataloguing and collections development are included in the Forward Plan.

12. Access

The Archive aims to:

- provide excellent services and facilities to enable anyone with an interest in the Archive's collections to access them
- provide physical access that is in keeping with the long-term preservation of the collections
- increase digital access to collections by developing online resources
- provide learning resources based on the Archive's holdings
- seek the views of users and potential users to help us to evaluate and improve the services the Archive offers

13. Online Access

The Archive provides the following online resource:

[The Archive Collections catalogue](#) – catalogued collections include over 80,000 items with over 20,000 digitised images of photographs, maps and plans viewable

This resource can be accessed via the [Waterways Archive](#) web page.

Additionally, you can access a 'Researching your waterway family history' guidance [here](#)

14. Enquiry service

The Archive provides a free basic 30 minute enquiry service and a charged-for research service. Full details of the services offered are available on request.

Due to limited Trust colleague resource, the team may refuse complex and/or voluminous requests, but alternatives will be suggested where possible.

15. Visits to the Reading Room and Library

The Archive Reading Room and Library are open by appointment to the public Tuesday - Thursday, 10.00am - 4.00pm.

All key information about visiting is provided on the Archive's website.

Visitors must book in advance and provide catalogue references with at least 48 hours notice to enable Trust colleagues to retrieve the documents.

Archive colleagues restrict what can be brought into the Reading Room & Library to protect the archive material from damage and to keep it secure.

Those under 16 who are accompanied by an adult and supervised by them at all times are welcome into the Reading Room.

16. Restrictions on Access

The Archive is committed to providing the widest possible access to collections, but access to vulnerable or damaged items may be restricted to prevent further deterioration.

Occasionally restrictions may also be applied due to the sensitive content of a collection.

When access restrictions are needed, Trust colleagues will notify users and offer alternatives if possible.

17. Charging

The Archive is committed to providing a core level of free access to its collections to anyone with an interest in the Waterways Archive collections.

There is no charge to visit or view items in the collection and a free basic search service can be provided.

The Archive charges for copies via a digitisation service. Prices are available on request and reflect the cost of producing copies.

Copying is subject to the condition of the item, copyright and any restrictions on access.

18. Reproduction permission

The re-use of items in the collection is permitted. A licence agreement form is available to request permission to reproduce items in the Archive's collections which specifies the permitted use and terms and conditions.

A reproduction fee, which is calculated based on the use requested, may be charged. Trust colleagues will always advise on applicable fees and request confirmation before issuing permission.

Where Trust colleagues cannot issue permission due to third-party copyright, or where additional permission from a third party is required, users will be directed to the appropriate rights holder(s) where possible.

19. Outreach

Introductory tours of the Archive in Ellesmere Port can be provided for anyone who would like to find out more about the Archive's holdings and collections care.

20. Collections Care and Conservation

The Archive team will maintain the highest standards of care possible for collections held by the Archive. The team seeks to implement high levels of preventive conservation to hinder deterioration and avoid undertaking treatments and repairs which can be prevented by collection care. Further details regarding the care, conservation and digital preservation of our records are available on request.

21. Digital Preservation

Increasingly, records offered to the Archive are digital, and the service must find ways in which to preserve these records and make them accessible to future generations. Digital content will be managed through the archive's digital repository in SharePoint and will be prepared for preservation storage through the generation of relevant metadata to support future use.

22. Storage

Most of the records held by the Archive are stored on-site in Ellesmere Port. A minority of records are stored off-site at Deep Store (a salt mine in Winsford, Cheshire).


23. Communication and review

This Policy Statement will be reviewed every 3 years and/or when a change in circumstances occurs. All versions of this policy will be approved by the Board of Trustees.



David Orr CBE

Chair to the Board of Trustees
19 November 2025



Campbell Robb

Chief Executive