

Wexford County Archive

Preservation Policy

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this preservation policy is to outline the principles of the preservation activities of Wexford County Archive (hereafter referred to as 'the Archive')

1.2 It also intends to communicate to those outside the organisation the principles that guide preservation in Wexford County Council

2. Authority

Section 65 of the Local Government Act, 1994 and Section 80 of the Local Government Act, 2001, sub-section 2, state that '*..... it is a function of a local authority to make arrangements for the proper management, custody, care and conservation of local records and local archives and for inspection by the public of local archives*'.

In February 2002, an archivist was appointed to Wexford County Council to oversee the implementation of the Council's statutory duties in respect of the preservation and availability of its archival material

3. Mission Statement

The mission statement of the Archive is to '*identify, collect, preserve and make available the archives, both public and private, of Co. Wexford, and to manage the records of Wexford County Council according to best practice*'.

4. Aims

4.1 The Archive aims to ensure that the public and private archives in its custody are preserved for present and future generations

4.2 It aims to alert staff and users to their joint responsibility regarding preservation

4.3 The preservation policy will be regularly monitored and updated periodically as new responsibilities and priorities change to reflect the needs of the Archive

5. Policy Statements

5.1 The Archive is responsible for, and committed to, ensuring the continued availability and authenticity of the archives that it holds in trust for present and future generations

5.2 All record types are to be valued based on their qualities and worth as archival records, irrespective of medium

5.3 It is vital that preservation concerns are considered at all stages of institutional life that affect the acquisition, maintenance and use of archival materials, i.e. preservation concerns are ongoing from the date of creation of some records, in particular those generated electronically

5.4 Preservation is not just the responsibility of the Archive but must be viewed as the appropriate concern of all staff members at every level in Wexford County Council and of all researchers using original materials in the Archive

6. Acquisition, appraisal and disposal

6.1 The Archive takes appropriate steps to acquire private archival material for permanent preservation in accordance with the Archive's acquisition policy

6.2 Preservation concerns will be considered at all stages in the acquisition, maintenance and use of archival materials

7. Definition of terms:

7.1. Preservation

Broadly encompasses those activities and functions designed to provide a suitable and safe environment that enhances the usable life of collections

7.2 Conservation

Entails the work of physical repair of archival documents whose aim is to stabilise materials in their original format by chemical and physical means - this is work that has to be outsourced to an appropriate professional conservator

8. Access

8.1 The Archive aims to seek an adequate balance between preservation and access

8.2 Descriptive lists of collections will be produced to guide users to the materials they require for their research which will significantly eliminate unnecessary handling of materials

8.3 It is the policy of the Archive that where archival material has been microfilmed, access to the original will not be granted unless under exceptional circumstances

8.4 Access will also be restricted where material has been closed due to sensitive or confidential content

8.5 Similarly, where material is particularly fragile and is awaiting conservation treatment, access will be closed until the necessary repair work is executed (subject to available resources)

8.6 It is the policy of the Archive not to allow access to material which has not been processed, i.e. properly listed and arranged

8.7 Access to locations where archival materials are stored will be restricted to the staff of the Archive. Storage areas will be dedicated to the sole storage of archival materials

9. Preservation

9.1 The Archive is responsible for the preservation of all records under its physical control. Proper steps are taken to safeguard the physical and moral integrity of archives in its custody, i.e. in storage, handling and use, reproduction and display

9.2 The Archivist acts in an advisory capacity to outside organisations and private individuals regarding preservation awareness, and furnishes a limited volume of acid-free storage materials where appropriate

9.3 Restrictions will be imposed by the condition of items. In some cases, it may not be feasible to salvage the original document/item and the preservation of the information contained therein takes precedence over the original format

9.4 Regularly accessed original items such as local maps and rentals will be made available in an alternative format in accordance with required standards, thus prolonging the life of the original by protecting it from over-handling and repeated duplication

9.5 For electronic material, preservation of content must begin at the time of acquisition in order to ensure sustainable access. Items acquired by the Archive in electronic format should be migrated every 3-5 years to ensure adequate readability and preservation of the information

9.6 The Archive will prepare and implement a disaster prevention plan to protect its holdings by appropriate response to emergencies and recovery actions, and will alert all members of staff to the necessary procedures to be adopted in such instances. An ongoing microfilming programme is added security in the case of disaster and is undertaken on a phased basis (subject to available resources)

10. Storage

10.1 As its most basic preservation measure, the Archive will seek to ensure that its holdings are secured in appropriate and secure accommodation. This means their storage in an environmentally controlled and monitored space that adheres to archives building standards, security, pest management, disaster-readiness and good housekeeping protocols

10.2 The quality of storage containers can have a decisive impact on the long-term

preservation of items to accommodate the needs of the archives. Items will be stored in appropriate storage enclosures of acid-free quality and shelved on appropriate steel shelving in accordance with recognised standards

10.3 Good housekeeping will be undertaken in the storage area and an integrated pest management programme documented

10.4 Physical damage can occur to documents in the presence of high humidity and in an excessively dry atmosphere. The Archive is responsible for ensuring optimum environmental standards for the preservation of records in all physical areas where they are stored and for ensuring that these standards are maintained. Temperature and humidity will be monitored on a regular basis as will the level of lighting and air cleanliness

10.5 Where resources permit, requirements for certain collections will be provided, e.g. a specific cold room for the storage of electronic media

11. Handling and use

11.1 The Archive will provide in-house training for all staff and others involved in the handling and preventive care of archival materials. Only staff with appropriate training will be permitted to handle archival records

11.2 Readers will be alerted to the care of archival materials through the *Researcher Guidelines* document and through the in-house publications/brochures *Out, damned spot! Preserving family papers and memorabilia* (2002) and *Preserving your family archives* (2002)

12. Conservation treatment

12.1 Any materials warranting conservation treatment will not be made available for research purposes until following treatment, where appropriate

12.2 The archivist will assess the conservation needs of items and list them in a conservation priority list. Newly acquired collections, despite their condition, will not take precedence over items already prioritised on the list

12.3 The Archive will consult with and employ professional expertise where necessary (and where resources permit)

12.4 The Archive will ensure that only qualified personnel carry out any cleaning or repair work undertaken on items

12.5 The Archive is responsible for ensuring that all archival records are correctly documented respecting ownership, incoming and current condition and the need for conservation treatment

13. Display

13.1 Items to be displayed in exhibitions will be shown in an appropriately controlled environment. Restrictions may be imposed on the types of materials exhibited and the duration of such exhibitions

13.2 In the case of loans of archives to other institutions or bodies for exhibition purposes, such loans may be restricted to duplicates. It will be at the discretion of the archivist whether the material loaned should be microfilmed or photographed in advance of the temporary transfer. Clear documentation should be generated and maintained regarding all such transfers/loans

13.3 A security policy in terms of the proper handling and packaging during the lending and transport of items from the Archive for exhibition purposes will be drawn up, specific to the requirements of both institutions, i.e. the lender and borrower