

Collection Information Policy

Our vision

Working with partners to be the physical and virtual heart of Suffolk's past, present and future archives and to encourage all those interested in the county's history in their journeys of discovery.

Our mission

Suffolk Archives helps residents and visitors engage with our county's rich heritage. It collects, conserves and communicates the recorded history of Suffolk from the 12th century to the present day, empowering people in exploring their roots, remembering their past, and planning their future.

1. Purpose of policy

This policy lays out how Suffolk Archives (SA) will fulfil its commitment to high quality collections information for all its collections, across all its collection management processes. It explains what information SA will gather about archive and Local Studies collections and should be used in conjunction with the Collecting Policy and Collection Development Policy. It outlines the history of collections information and cataloguing at SA, and the current cataloguing systems and professional standards used. The policy is supported by a separate Collections Information Plan which sets out the objectives through which SA will achieve its aims.

2. The importance of collections information

Collections information constitutes all the resources that describe and explain the content of SA's archive and Local Studies collections and is vital for interpreting what SA holds and enabling people to identify relevant collections.

Maintaining accurate documentation of our archival holdings is central to SA's mission to conserve and communicate the recorded history of the county. This information consists of two parts: accessioning information and cataloguing information, both of which are collected and stored using a central specialist archive software system called CALM. SA also has catalogues and indexes in analogue format, and historical handwritten and typed accessions registers. There is a plan to add these to CALM to create one overall source of information about SA's holdings. A procedural manual for CALM, and an Accessions procedure and Cataloguing procedure guide all staff and volunteers in their collections information work.

The Local Studies Library collections information is held on and added to the Suffolk Community Libraries online catalogue. SA also has card indexes and catalogues in analogue format and historical handwritten and typed accessions registers for some parts of the Local Studies collection.

SA recognises that accurate, detailed, accessible collections information is fundamental in enabling SA to fulfil its Vision and Mission. It enables collections to be accessible and meaningful and provides the basis for developing new services, activities and engaging new audiences. Robust collections information is also fundamental to ensuring the security of collections and managing their physical and intellectual care, as well as prioritising the use of resources in collections care. SA is committed to ensuring that it develops appropriate collections information for all the archives in its care.

3. Historical approach to collections information at SA

The collections of the former Bury and West Suffolk Record Office and the Ipswich and East Suffolk Record Office grew piecemeal from the late 1920s onwards and each had their own classification and numbering systems, and cataloguing procedures. In 1974 the Suffolk Record Office was created by the unification of the two offices and a new alpha-numeric classification and numbering system was adopted. In 1985 a third branch of the Suffolk Record Office was opened in Lowestoft Library to serve the north-east corner of the county; the area equivalent to that of the new Waveney District Council. Lowestoft developed its own numeric classification system and geographically relevant collections from the Ipswich Record Office were moved up to Lowestoft and re-numbered. In 2019, Suffolk Record Office was renamed to become Suffolk Archives.

CALM was introduced in 1996 and has been used since then for all accession records and new cataloguing. Alongside this there has been a programme of retro-conversion of analogue catalogues and indexes carried out by staff and volunteers. In addition, all backlog cataloguing has been done directly on CALM. There has also been a programme of adding earlier accessions information onto CALM, which is ongoing.

In common with all archives, SA has a cataloguing backlog as staff have been unable to keep pace with cataloguing incoming material. There have been a number of attempts to address this. In 1993, there was a 5-year programme which reduced it from 28.9% to 16.7%. The backlog began to grow again but SA made further inroads between 2000 and 2005 as a result of Access to Archives (A2A) funding. In 2009-2010 SA used temporary project staff, volunteers and permanent staff to reduce the cataloguing backlog by a further 10.77%.

In 2010 SA launched its first online catalogue on the Suffolk Heritage Direct website which contained catalogue information for all 508 parish collections and a selection of large and significant collections from all three branches which were catalogued on CALM, such as the Suffolk Photographic Survey and The Suffolk Regiment Archive. However, it was difficult and time consuming to upload catalogues and was replaced in 2016 with the Suffolk Archives website which has a much easier process for uploading catalogue information.

SA continues to operate with a cataloguing backlog, but the Collections Team and cataloguing volunteers continue to catalogue both new and existing collections when resource allows.

4. The impact of legislation and standards

Suffolk County Council (SCC) and SA are required to meet a range of legislative and professional requirements that are only possible if there is high quality collections information to enable ready access to the content of collections.

- *Public Records Act* (1962 and subsequent revisions) – requires any Place of Deposit that ‘arrangements [are] to be made for their inspection by the public comparable to those made for public records in the Public Record Office’ (now The National Archives), which includes to ‘compile and make available indexes and guides to, and calendars and texts of, the records’.
- *Freedom of Information Act (2000)* - requires that SCC is able to respond to FOI enquiries promptly, which is only possible if records are appropriately described. The National Archives

also expects that Places of Deposit may well create their own descriptions of public records in line with their in-house cataloguing systems.

- *Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations (2018)* - requires careful collecting and processing of personal data of living individuals. It also requires that a body have the capacity to report to an individual what data is held about them and to make amendments where necessary. This is only possible if an organisation understands what information it holds in the first place
- *Manorial Documents Rules* - owners or custodians of manorial documents must provide the Secretary of The National Archives: Historical Manuscripts Commission with brief details of any documents in their possession for inclusion in the Manorial Documents Register. Any change in ownership of manorial records must be notified to him. They are also required to ensure that any manorial documents for which they are responsible are kept under safe and proper conditions.
- *Parochial Registers and Records Measure (1978)* – requires that certain records are readily available for public research which requires a Diocesan Record Office to know what parochial records it holds.
- *Archive Service Accreditation Standard (2014)* – requires that accredited archive services have a comprehensive system of policies, plans and procedures to ensure the creation and accessibility of appropriate collections information.

5. Systems for recording collections information

SA staff gather information at all stages of the deposit, accessioning and cataloguing processes. Both the archive and Local Studies material have different but related procedures in place. The information is recorded and maintained in a variety of formats, depending on the date of deposit, which include:

- Accession Registers (paper and electronic)
- CALM Collections Management database
- Correspondence files (paper and electronic) which include signed copies of gift receipts
- Entry forms
- Locations indexes (card and electronic)
- Paper catalogues
- Other finding aids including handlists, specific indexes (analogue and electronic)
- Marking and labelling of objects
- Document request slips
- Transfers and loans paperwork (paper and electronic)

6. Point of deposit and accessioning

All new accessions receive a unique accession number. Since 1996 the CALM accessions database has been used to record information about every donation, loan, purchase and bequest of records, which is key for preserving the integrity of Suffolk's archival heritage. The CALM database is backed up daily. There has been a programme for adding earlier accessions information to CALM and only the very earliest accessions for Bury and Ipswich are outstanding. These tend to have less detail and are more complex and sometimes difficult to interpret so need to be completed by archivists.

At the point of deposit, for any item/s, a triplicate entry form, with a unique entry number, is completed and signed by the donor/owner/depositor and staff (this system has been in operation

since 2007). One copy is given to the donor/owner/depositor, one stays physically with the material, and one copy is the control. It records the deposit date and contact details for the depositor, basic information about the provenance, size, conditions of deposit, including intellectual property rights and legal status (where known), any restrictions on access, dates of creation, and a brief description. SA asks owners to supply a list or schedule and welcomes all relevant information regarding a collection that can be supplied at the point of accession.

For Local Studies material, a duplicate entry form with a unique reference number is completed on donation. This is signed by the donator, and a copy provided as a receipt. The remaining copy is stored with the material until it is fully catalogued, and then filed as the control.

SA also records information about the physical condition of collections at the point of deposit and during accession. This information is used to inform future work programmes to catalogue, conserve and provide access to material. For catalogued material this information is recorded on the CALM catalogue record which is then linked to the CALM conservation record, which outlines any work done to make the item accessible.

For archives, the accession information forms the basis of the CALM record when the material is accessioned and an accession number and reference number are allocated. Other information recorded includes the title, accession category (gift, loan, transfer, bequest) and administrative and custodial history, where applicable.

Additional deposits are recorded in the *Details* field. The *Custodial history* field in CALM will be used to record actions relating to the evaluation of the accession for permanent retention, as well as the quantities of any material weeded, or confidentially disposed of. The *Copyright* field records any specific information relating to any known intellectual property rights; where no information is given staff are guided by the terms of Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and the Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003. The *Priority* field in CALM is used to record cataloguing complete for that accession and noting if the accession includes nationally and internationally significant material. This will enable staff to make more informed judgements when it comes to prioritising collections for cataloguing.

Donors/owners/depositors are encouraged to provide a list of the material in spreadsheet format which can be imported directly into CALM. We aim to send a formal receipt, which includes SA's 'Terms of Deposit' and is legally binding, within 4-6 weeks of deposit.

Creating bodies transferring or presenting local public records to SA as a designated 'Place of Deposit' e.g. prisons, coroner's courts, hospitals etc are advised to read [Guidance for places of deposit - Archives sector](#) prior to contacting SA.

To make information about our new accessions as widely available as possible, lists are published annually on the Suffolk Archives website and advertised at the Friends of Suffolk Archives AGM. SA also participates in The National Archives' annual accessions to repositories survey.

To comply with the Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations and confidentiality of the deposit agreement, full details of the accession register will not normally be made available to the public. Some historic catalogues still retain depositor names and an indication of residence.

7. Finding aids

The catalogues and indexes at SA are an amalgamation of a number of various classification systems that evolved over the years as the Archives has developed. Each branch has created handlists, typed and card catalogues and indexes to help researchers navigate their way through the variety of formats and styles. These include card indexes for name, place and subject that direct the user to the catalogues, which provide additional information. There are also specialist indexes for material such as wills, manuscript maps, photographs, illustrations and prints. The catalogues themselves vary in their details and can be categorized as follows:

- Fully catalogued (in accordance with at the mandatory elements of ISAD (G) see below)
- Fully catalogued (but to a lower standard than ISAD (G) see below)
- Box-listed or roughly-listed material, or collections for which only collection-level descriptions exist
- Completely unlisted collections

Work to improve access through converting the catalogues and indexes to an electronic format is part of SA's Documentation Plan. As analogue catalogues are added to the CALM database the aim is to upgrade them to meet the necessary standards (see below) and to upload them to the Suffolk Archives website. SA's catalogues are also available on TNA Discovery website, though some catalogues are still only accessible in hard copy format.

8. Cataloguing

Cataloguing the material in its care is essential for the effective management of SA's collections, to enable public access as appropriate and to help to inform and devise engaging activities for all audiences. SA directs cataloguing through its Documentation Plan to achieve a strategic and flexible approach to creating new and improved information about its collections, whether this be analogue archive collections or born digital archives.

Cataloguing since 1996 has been undertaken using CALM software with a manual outlining in-house procedures and styles. All new cataloguing and indexing conforms to current professional standards:

- The mandatory elements of International Council on Archives, General International Standard of Archival Description [ISAD(G)]
- International Council on Archives, International Standard Archival Authority for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families [ISAAR(CPF)]
- National Council on Archives, Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names [NCA Rules]
- the UK Archival Thesaurus (UKAT) for subject definitions

Before 1996 some standardisation of approach was informed by an in-house manual, but in the early years cataloguing was undertaken following a variety of individual styles, resulting in great variation in the quality and level of detail of these earlier catalogues and indexes.

SA aims to catalogue parish and nonconformist registers on receipt, as well as smaller accessions (up to the size of a small archive box), using a combination of staff and volunteers. External funding is also sought to support cataloguing work. Larger accessions and backlog collections are prioritised based on demand, significance, availability, and skill levels of staff and volunteers.

Accruals to existing collections are catalogued separately but linked to previous deposits from the same source through their reference numbers, hierarchical arrangement in CALM and cross-referencing within the catalogue entries.

9. Restrictions on access

SA's collections include records subject to certain access restrictions, or periods during which the records are closed. These may be determined by legislation such as the Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations, advice and guidance from The National Archives and the Information Commissioner's Office or imposed by the depositor or depositing organisation. SA will review existing catalogued collections when closure periods or legislation change to ensure that sensitive or personal information is protected, where required, and update any accession and catalogue entries.

10. Locations, loans and transfers

SA aims to maintain up to date information on the locations of all the collections in its care. Each branch had an historical location index, and a list of missing or mislaid documents is maintained. If archive material is temporarily withdrawn by the depositors or donors, a duplicate form is completed and signed by them and SA staff and a copy kept with the proof of ID or authorisation for withdrawal. Regular reviews of the list of withdrawn material ensures that material is returned as agreed.

11. Disposals and withdrawals

On deposit, SA captures depositors'/owners'/donors' permissions to destroy or transfer to another repository any material that we are unable to keep. Where appropriate, these permissions are reconfirmed prior to disposal. SA records details of any disposals, including rationale.

SA has a Micro-Collecting policy which outlines recommendations for permanent preservation and disposals and is informed by schedules produced by organisations such as the County Council, Archives and Records Association, Church of England, The Methodist Church and The National Archives. See the Collection Development Policy and the Collection Development Plan for further information about disposal of archives.

12. Staffing and funding

The Collections Team are responsible for all accessions to the archives and for cataloguing small new collections and additional deposits. They also support volunteers, students on work placement and other staff on backlog cataloguing, including checking electronic catalogues (data cleansing) and preparing them for upload to the website. Spreadsheets are maintained to monitor accessioning work and progress with uploading catalogues.

SA receives a regular cataloguing grant from the Friends of Suffolk Archives and seeks external grant funding where appropriate e.g. National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Cataloguing Grants Scheme, The National Archives, working with partners to support these applications. Where project staff are employed they are usually supported by volunteers.

13. Protecting your collections information

SA recognises the importance of its collections information, and ensures the security of it to avoid loss or compromise. This is part of SA's duty of care to depositors and donors, as well as to the collections. CALM is backed up daily and the electronic files such as receipts, correspondence,

copyright permissions, draft lists and catalogues are stored on SCC's networked Sharepoint sites and are therefore subject to the Council's overall data backup, security and disaster recovery routines. Paper files are held in lockable filing cabinets in staff areas and hard-copy accession registers are stored in our strongrooms.

14. Related documents

This policy informs the Collecting, Collection Development and Access policies. This policy will be reported on as part of the annual performance review of the SA.

15. Review period

This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if a response is needed to any changes in legislation.

Last reviewed June 2025

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