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Collections information policy for Archives and Modern Manuscripts

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1. Scope

This policy sets out the principles by which archival collections are described and processed across the Special Collections division of Cambridge University Library, including the Department of Archives and Modern Manuscripts (which incorporates the University Archives), the Map Department, the Bible Society and the Royal Commonwealth Society.

2. Background

The Library holds an enormous range of personal and institutional archives, including several large institutional archives on deposit. Many of its collections were accessioned before the development of modern standards-based cataloguing. The Library aims to produce standards-compliant online catalogue records for all its holdings but has substantial backlogs of archival material requiring cataloguing and catalogues requiring retro-conversion. Each section of Special Collections holding archives is responsible for processing its own holdings according to the principles laid down in this policy.

3. Accessioning

Each section maintains its own accessions register for purchases, donations, deposits and transfers. Any significant accessions are reported quarterly to the Library Syndicate. Personal or sensitive (e.g. purchase price) information from the accessions register is not made available for access but summary information is submitted to The National Archives as part of its annual 'Accessions to Repositories' exercise. Receipts or agreements are produced for every accession or transfer.

4. Collection status information

Information on the status of a transfer of records, on any restrictions to access under the Data Protection Act 1998 and on intellectual property rights is documented at accession and appears in the published catalogue.

5. Cataloguing

Professional staff plan and carry out cataloguing work. They also allocate cataloguing tasks to para-professional staff and volunteers in accordance with the complexity of the tasks and the skills and experience of the individual and oversee adherence to standards

6. Standards

All new cataloguing incorporates the mandatory elements of ISAD(G). When retro-converting legacy findings aids, all reasonable efforts are made to conform to the mandatory elements of ISAD(G).

In creating controlled access terms, the following standards are used:

- Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names;
- Rules for the construction of personal, family and place names (National Council on Archives, 1997);
- UK Archival Thesaurus.

7. Software and systems

Catalogues for the University Archives, Royal Greenwich Observatory, Map Department, Bible Society and Royal Commonwealth Society are produced using five separate instances of Cantab, an ISAD(G) compliant database for the hierarchical cataloguing of archives developed by Cambridge archivists using Microsoft Access.

Catalogues for the Department of Archives and Modern Manuscripts are produced using AtoM.

8. Backlogs and prioritising

Resources for cataloguing are limited. The first priority is to produce collection level descriptions for all holdings. In order to determine priorities for more detailed cataloguing and retro-conversion, collections are assessed according to an agreed set of criteria:

- Significance and actual or potential research interest
- Ownership (collections owned by the Library have a higher priority than deposited collections)

- Feasibility (including the amount of time and particular skills or expertise required to complete the project)
- Suitability for external funding applications.

Full catalogues for collections comprise detailed descriptions of the contents, generally down to file or item level, and access points. In order to maximise time and resources, following a priority assessment, collections may sometimes be catalogued to series or sub-series level only.

9. Publishing catalogues

Catalogues are published as EAD files on Janus, a union catalogue of archives in Cambridge (<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk>).

Where catalogues are only available in hard copy and awaiting retro-conversion, these are available to users in the Manuscripts reading room. Catalogues are available for a proportion of collections on the Archives Hub or The National Archives Discovery platform, mainly as a legacy of externally funded cataloguing projects (e.g. by NCUACS). The Library aims to have catalogue data available as widely as possible. Opportunities are actively being explored to share comprehensive archival catalogue data via relevant discovery platforms, including the Library's own platform (idiscover.cam.ac.uk).

10. Acknowledgements

This policy draws on:

The National Archives, *Developing a Collections Information Policy* (2015)
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/developing-a-collections-information-policy-march-2016.pdf>

Churchill Archives Centre, *Cataloguing and Collection Processing Policy* (2016)
<https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/about/policies/cataloguing/>

King's College London, *Archives Services Collection Information Policy* (2016)
https://www.kcl.ac.uk/library/archivespec/documents/archivesdocs/arr_coll_info_pol_2_3_1.pdf

Leicester University Library, *Archives Collections Management Policy* (2016)
<https://www2.le.ac.uk/library/downloads/collection-policies/special-collections-policy>

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