

City of Westminster Archives

Acquisition Policy

March 2023



City of Westminster

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This policy aims to define and clarify the criteria used to determine the selection of items to be held in the City of Westminster Archives. Such a definition will ensure that appropriate material is acquired to further the aims of City of Westminster Archives as expressed in its mission statement (see **1.2**).
- 1.2. The City of Westminster Archives exists to support the purpose of the Libraries & Archives service to *Read, Learn and Connect*, by preserving and sharing the unique written and visual heritage of Westminster, fostering community identity and pride for current and future generations.
- 1.3. Ongoing collection development which will ensure long-term access to information is at the core of the Westminster City Council Fairer Westminster strategy by: -
 - Providing cultural and learning opportunities for Westminster residents by maintaining access to digital materials.
 - Ensuring long-term access to the information and services they need to improve their lives.
 - Making it easier to find the information and services people need to improve their lives, by providing remote and onsite access to digital archives and visual copying services.

2. Statutory Position

- 2.1. The City of Westminster Archives provides an archives and local studies service in compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Records) Act 1962, the Local Government Act 1972, the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the City of Westminster Council Library Bylaws.
- 2.2. The Archives is designated by the Bishop of London, under the terms of the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978, as the repository for ecclesiastical records for the pre-1965 City of Westminster.
- 2.3. The Archives has been appointed by the Lord Chancellor as a repository for specified classes of public records under the provisions of Section 4 of the Public Records Act 1958. These include Petty Sessions records, probate records of the Westminster Commissary Court and Coroner's Court Records. The archives are stored under the conditions specified in BS 4971:2017.
- 2.4. The Archives is recognised by the Master of the Rolls as a repository for manorial and tithe documents under the Law of Property Act 1922 and the Tithe Act 1936.
- 2.5. The Archives is recognised by the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) as

a suitable repository under the *Standard for Record Repositories*.

3. Archive Acquisitions

3.1. Geographical area

Archives are acquired which relate to the geographical area covered by the present City of Westminster. The London Borough of Westminster or City of Westminster, as it is known, came into being in 1965 under the Local Government Act 1963.

The City of Westminster is made up of the three former metropolitan boroughs of Paddington, St Marylebone, and Westminster themselves created in 1900 from the Civil Parishes of: -

- Paddington
- St Marylebone
- Close of the Collegiate Church of St Peter
- Liberty of the Rolls
- Precinct of the Savoy
- St Anne Soho
- St Clement Danes
- St George Hanover Square
- St James Piccadilly
- St Martin in the Fields
- St Mary-le-Strand
- St Paul Covent Garden
- Westminster St Margaret and St John

3.2. Chronological period

All records that meet the selection criteria are accepted regardless of date. Council records are only accepted when they have reached the end of their active life-cycle, in consultation with the Records Management Centre and generating departments.

3.3. Genre and media of records held

3.3.1. The Archives Centre exists primarily to care for the non-current records of the City of Westminster Council and its predecessor authorities, where these are judged to be worthy of permanent retention on legal, administrative, or historical grounds.

3.3.2. The Archives also holds parish registers and ecclesiastical parish records and public records under the statutory obligations referred to in section 2.

3.3.3. The Archives collects non-current records of local businesses, organisations or individuals relating to, or emanating from, the area comprising the present the

City of Westminster, including records of estates, churches, societies, schools, businesses, and private individuals, where these are judged to be worthy of permanent retention on legal, administrative, or historical grounds.

- 3.3.4. Autograph letters of Westminster residents and single item archives will not be collected unless they add significantly to our knowledge of Westminster.
 - 3.3.5. Microform or facsimile copies of relevant Westminster records held elsewhere are not collected unless originals cannot be accessed in any other way.
 - 3.3.6. The archives are not defined by format and may include paper, parchment, audio and audio-visual media, digital formats which adhere to an agreed standard for files formats, or any other format which holds unique legal, administrative, or historical evidence deemed worthy of permanent preservation. For more details on acquisition and assessment of digital materials see the Digital Preservation Policy.
 - 3.3.7. The City of Westminster Archives will not normally accept three-dimensional artefacts unless they have a special relationship with the associated archives held or are intended to form part of the Education Officer's handling collection.
 - 3.3.8. The archives will proactively work to reflect the rich, cultural diversity of Westminster and collect records which represents all aspects of its communities and history, regardless of language or script. Libraries & Archives are committed to becoming an anti-racist service and ensuring that this is reflected in our collecting practices. Where necessary, we will work with colleagues, community contacts or employ specialist skills to catalogue and enable access to records where we do not have the appropriate in-house skills.
- 3.4. Co-operation with other repositories
 - 3.4.1. City of Westminster Archives Centre will not collect material which complies more closely with the acquisitions criteria of another local authority or specialist repository.
 - 3.4.2. Should a dispute over a deposit arise with another repository, the advice of an independent arbiter (e.g. The National Archives or Business Archives Council) will be sought.

4. Acquisitions Processing

- 4.1. Methods of acquisition
 - 4.1.1. Records are primarily acquired by:-
 - transfer from council departments
 - transfer from Records Management
 - donation

- 4.1.2. City of Westminster Archives Centre will not offer indefinite loan as a standard acquisition option for new deposits unless:-
- the deposit is an accrual from a previous deposit agreement
 - the depositor is a large organization who retains accountability and responsibility for the legal obligations in remaining the owner of the deposit
 - it is at the discretion of the Service Lead (Archives, Collections & Resources)
- 4.1.3. City of Westminster Archives Centre does not hold funds to purchase archive material. Any potential item for sale should be brought to their attention by the seller with ample notice for external funding to be arranged, should the item be of historical value and would significantly enhance the collection.
- 4.1.4. Potential acquisitions will be surveyed by professional staff from the Archives Centre prior to acceptance. Documents will only be considered for purchase if they are deemed to be of outstanding importance to the City of Westminster.
- 4.1.5. Digital records will be transferred to a suitable storage facility and managed appropriately, including appropriate integrity check methods. The process will ensure descriptive information is captured so that it is searchable and linked to records to enable discoverability.
- 4.2. Terms and conditions
- 4.2.1. Only documents which are deemed to be of sufficient quality for permanent preservation will be accepted.
- 4.2.2. The City of Westminster Archives Centre is committed to promoting access to collections and may not accept material that has long closure periods or complex access restrictions if this outweighs its historical value. However, legal and administrative restrictions on access to records (see Westminster City Archives Access Policy, legislation and standards), including confidentiality restrictions for personnel records, will be observed.
- 4.2.3. Standard terms and conditions of deposit are stated in **City of Westminster Archives Centre Deposit Agreement**, a copy of which is attached (**Appendix 1**) Where necessary, these conditions may vary according to circumstances e.g. access restrictions specified by the donor. These must be signed by the donor upon deposit to the archives.
- 4.2.4. Documents will not be accepted from persons or institutions who have no legal right to donate, deposit or sell them.

4.2.5. Detailed lists or finding aids may be required with sizable deposits or deposits in languages other than English, to ensure that the records are processed in a timely manner and access can be provided. If the depositor is unable to provide this, City of Westminster Archives will work with the depositor to ensure a solution is found to enable the collection to be listed as soon as is practicably possible.

4.2.6. City of Westminster Archives will only accept records where there are sufficient resources available to store and administer them to the required standards as defined in BS 4971:2017. Where sufficient resources are not available, all alternative options to support the deposit of a sizeable collection will be explored and seek advice, where necessary from The National Archives.

4.3. Selection and deaccessioning

Potential donors are required to initially contact City of Westminster Archives Centre with a list of items they wish to donate or deposit Before making any further arrangements for their transfer.

4.3.1. Records relating to national or international businesses/organisations which happen to have offices based in Westminster will not be collected, unless they represent an integral part of the history or identity of the City of Westminster.

4.3.2. City of Westminster Archives Centre reserves the right to refuse archive collections which it feels would be better suited in a different repository or would not enhance the archive collections, even if it meets the criteria of this policy.

4.3.3. In accordance with the wishes and permission of depositors where possible, City of Westminster Archives Centre will evaluate and select for disposal those documents that are not deemed worthy of permanent preservation (e.g., ephemera and duplicate material or material beyond physical repair) The intention shall be made clear at the time of transfer.

4.3.4. Where necessary, selection will be made in agreement with the Conservator to ensure the items are deemed to have no mold, pests or are not beyond repair. See Conservation Preservation Policy for more information.

4.3.5. Once selected and accessioned, records will be preserved permanently. However, collections received prior to the implementation of the current acquisitions policy may be re-evaluated and, if necessary, deaccessioned. See Disposal Policy for more information.

5. Local Studies

The following categories of material are acquired:

5.1. Books

- all books on Westminster, including pamphlets, theses and Council publications
- books on London, or other subjects, which include a substantial amount on Westminster or notable Westminster residents
- general reference books needed by the staff for their work and collection on archives (their care and use) and conservation
- reference books supporting research of the Westminster collections (e.g. theatre history, social history)
- guides to neighbouring record offices and to specific classes of archives (e.g. books on probate records)
- reference books on genealogy and related subjects and biographical reference works
- books relating to the life and works of William Blake forming part of the Preston Blake collection

The collection does **not** include: -

- biographies (except where Westminster connections are very strong)
- fiction
- Westminster imprints
- annual reports of Westminster firms
- government department publications

5.2. Periodicals

The following are acquired:

- council minutes
- local papers and periodicals, including parish magazines and residents' associations publications.
- general periodicals on local and family history and those specifically on London
- periodicals on archives and conservation

5.3. Cuttings

Cuttings taken from newspapers and periodicals are acquired only where these are the best/only information source on the subject or represent a notable opinion. These should be mainly topographical, relate to Council policy or any subject particularly relevant to Westminster.

Cuttings are **not** collected on: -

- theatre criticism

- law reports
- unidentified parts of Westminster (e.g. “a flat in Mayfair”)
- reviews (of restaurants, clubs, exhibitions etc.) unless these include substantial information about the history or architecture of the site or premises

5.4. Theatre collection

Material relating to Westminster and West End theatres and performance venues are acquired. These include: -

- programmes
- playbills
- photograph albums

Other material may be accepted at the discretion of an archivist.

Programmes for theatres outside of Westminster or duplicates of material already held will not be accepted. If these are offered as part of a larger donation, they will be disposed of in line with the terms of deposit as set out in this policy.

5.5. Maps

Maps of Westminster are acquired with the following exceptions:-

- small scale maps unless they are for dates when no larger scale exists
- current Ordnance Survey maps if smaller than 1:1250
- widely published maps of which we already have copies in the collection

5.6. Prints

Images of Westminster past and present are acquired under the following criteria:-

- topographical accuracy is more important than artistic merit
- they are not duplicates (or effectively duplicates) of items already in our custody
- they are not oil paintings, except by donation

5.7. Surrogates

Microfilms, aperture cards, transparencies, digital copies and other surrogates are only acquired under the following categories:-

- copies used in order to preserve original items
- copies of items which are difficult to handle
- copies of Westminster material held elsewhere and are publicly inaccessible
- maps for reference purposes

8. Collecting Priorities

8.1. City of Westminster Archives will proactively work to collect records on the following areas for its archive and local studies collections:

- Historical and current material representing the LGBTQ+ communities, with a special focus on the people and places within the Soho area
- Historical and current material representing global majority populations of the City of Westminster, which better reflects the history and demographic makeup of modern Westminster
- Born Digital records from the City of Westminster and other potential donors
- Plans and images reflecting topographical changes in the City of Westminster
- Rapid Response Collecting in response to major incidents or loss of historically important businesses in the area.

City of Westminster Archives acknowledges that dependence on collection development policies and criteria may anchor existing biases, to combat this the Archives are committed to understanding and removing potential biases in collecting policies, practices, and systems.

Records reflective of the plurality of voices which are essential to ensure that these objectives are achieved, that collections are fit for purpose, and the service meets the needs of all its current, new and future potential users.

9. Access

Each new acquisition, and any restrictions on its access or use, will be notified to the public at the earliest opportunity through its online catalogue WESTCAT.

- 9.1. City of Westminster Archives will contribute to The National Archives catalogue Discovery, and other relevant portals to improve access to its collections.
- 9.2. City of Westminster Archives will complete an annual return of new deposits to The National Archives and will supply deposit lists to donors and any appropriate bodies as deemed relevant.
- 9.3. City of Westminster Archives is committed to addressing any classification systems that support colonial perspectives of the world or use offensive terms.

10. Review

The Acquisitions Policy will be reviewed in March 2025.

City of Westminster Archives Deposit Agreement

Part One: Terms of Deposit

1. Possible terms of deposit are set out in section **4.1.** of the Acquisitions Policy.
2. City of Westminster Archives is only willing to accept records on indefinite loan under specific circumstances as outlined in section **4.1.** of the Acquisitions Policy. This in no way affects the ownership of the records. The Council will take all reasonable precautions to preserve the records from damage, loss or theft, but shall not otherwise be liable beyond this to the depositor for any damage to or loss or theft of them during the time of deposit.
3. Records which are deemed to be beyond repair or of no historical interest may be returned to the depositor or, with the consent of the depositor, transferred to a more appropriate place of deposit or destroyed in line with the Disposal Policy
4. The Council reserves the right to digitise or otherwise copy the records to preserve them. The ownership of all such copies is vested in the Council.
5. The records may be stamped and numbered with a finding reference for identification and security.
6. Records will be listed as soon as practicable as part of the programme of listing and cataloguing. The reference number will be provided to the depositor. The ownership of copyright in the lists shall be vested in the Council.
7. Records will be available to the public during the advertised opening hours of the Archives Centre. Restrictions may be placed on the use of records by agreement between the depositor and an Archivist (acting on behalf of the Council).
8. The Council retains the right to refuse access to documents, for example to those which are too fragile to use until they have been repaired, or those closed in line with data protection and public records legislation.
9. Copies of records may be supplied to the public for private study, in accordance with the Copyright Act in force at the time. In cases where City of Westminster Archives are not the legal owner, the depositor will be asked before a document is reproduced for publication. Where legal enquiries are known to be being made, the permission of the depositor will be requested before the documents are produced.

Part Two: Agreement

Name:	
Address:	
Email:	Phone:

Description of deposit:	
Covering dates:	Extent:
Terms of Deposit (as agreed with the Archivist at time of deposit)	
	Tick one
Bequest	
Donation	
Indefinite Loan	
Purchase	
Transfer from Council	
Transfer from Local Studies	
Transfer from Records Management	
Conditions / special requirements	
	Tick one
Open full access	
Closed: no access until _____	
Part Closed	
Other (free text)	
Date of deposit:	

- I agree to the Terms of Deposit as set out above
- I agree to have my name and contact details added to the City of Westminster's collections database for the duration of the retention of the deposit.

Signed (Depositor):

Name:

Date:

Signed (City of Westminster Archives):

Name:

Date: