

Wandsworth Heritage Service

Appraisal Policy

1 Background

- 1.1 The nature of the building in which the archive collections of Wandsworth Heritage Service are stored makes it crucial to maximise the space available for storage of archival material. Appraisal and removal of duplicate and ephemeral material plays a vital role in allowing our services to maintain control of storage spaces.
- 1.2 Twentieth century archival material is particularly heavy in terms of quantity. Appraisal is necessary to maintain control of this material and to ensure that only the items most useful and relevant to research are retained.
- 1.3 The passing of the Freedom of Information Act in 2000 has made the recording of information about appraisal, and especially disposal, decisions of vital importance to those collections covered by the act. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Management of Records, issued under section 46 of the ***Freedom of Information Act 2000*** states '*...authorities need to have in place systems for managing appraisal and for recording the disposal decisions made*'.
- 1.4 In addition to providing evidence of legitimate destruction of records, a written assessment of the volume and nature of records due for disposal, the time taken to appraise records, and the risks associated with destruction or delay in appraisal will provide information to support our resource planning and workflow arrangements.

2 Scope

This policy applies to all collections stored and maintained by Wandsworth Heritage Service. It includes both collections owned by the Heritage Service and those deposited on long term loan. For loaned material, our right to appraise will be negotiated and enshrined in the deposit agreement for each collection. This policy covers the appraisal of newly-deposited material, and also considers the re-appraisal of existing collections.

3 Definition of archival appraisal

Appraisal is the process of distinguishing records of continuing value from those of no further value so that the latter may be eliminated. When carried out successfully, archival appraisal limits the contents of collections to those records which are of continuing value for research purposes and ensures that records of

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long-term archival value are identified so that provision can be made for their preservation. **Appraisal is a quality control mechanism. It is a desirable, positive and essential archival activity, not a necessary evil.**

4 Aims

- To ensure that appraisal for archival purposes selects records of the highest archival value, avoiding duplication. All records can be deemed of potential archival value but an archive must be able to preserve and conserve records permanently and must therefore limit its holdings to records of the highest archival value.
- To assess the historical significance of individual items, series and collections across the Wandsworth Heritage Service collections. In particular to develop appraisal guidelines for records common to certain types of organisations.
- To develop and implement strategies which enable robust and coherent appraisal decisions to be made.
- To provide rational and cost-effective appraisal methods.
- To provide rational appraisal decisions for all records of potential archival value produced by the organisations and individuals whose collections are deposited at Wandsworth Heritage Service, which can apply equally to paper and electronic records and are valid over time.
- To ensure that records in all collections deposited at Wandsworth Heritage Service are being appraised consistently and within a legal framework (as appropriate).
- To destroy duplicate material and ephemera.
- To support the strategic objectives and collection themes of our Collection Policy.
- To be aware of usage and potential future research, but to assess these needs alongside overall collection and acquisition strategies.
- To show imagination and flair in large scale appraisal, particularly pre-deposit appraisal.

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- To assess risk in all circumstances and make decisions based on full analysis of available information
- To destroy all material confidentially; not to offer unwanted material to other repositories except in exceptional circumstances.

5 Procedures for appraisal

- Appraisal will be carried out by qualified archival professionals, or by paraprofessionals under the supervision of a qualified archivist.
- Appraisal of new deposits will be carried out in two stages, before receipt into the repository and after receipt during the cataloguing process.
- Where practicable, an initial appraisal exercise will be carried out by staff prior to collections being deposited. This will generally be undertaken at a 'series' level and will enable staff to identify series or types of records which are not worthy of long-term preservation and avoid the necessity of taking this material into the archive and removing it at a later stage. It is course entirely possible that a collection will be rejected in its entirety.
- Pre-acquisition appraisal will also provide an opportunity to identify and reject collections whose informational value duplicates others already held at Wandsworth Heritage Service.
- For newly-deposited material, appraisal will generally be carried out during the cataloguing process on a file by file basis, based on the methodology and using the criteria outlined below.
- Donated collections will be appraised routinely without requesting permission from the depositor or any other source.
- For loaned collections we will ensure the right to appraise is embedded in each deposit agreement. After appraisal, owners of collections will be offered a choice between taking back appraised items, or allowing the items to be sent for confidential destruction.
- Re-appraisal will often be necessary for larger collections if no appraisal was carried out at the time of acquisition.

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- Two methods of appraisal will be used for existing collections, depending on their size and complexity.
- Smaller collections may be appraised on a file by file basis.
- Appraisal on a larger scale will utilise the file by file method but in some cases this will be supplemented by macro-appraisal.
- Macro-appraisal will be applied to very large collections, where the value of the records can be assessed at departmental or unit level rather than at an individual file level. This type of appraisal encourages organisation-wide analysis of functions as a guide to identifying records of value for archival purposes.
- Macro-appraisal can be used to identify areas of overlap between departments so avoiding duplication of information and sometimes of sources selected for the archive.
- For both the above methods, we will develop guidance for the appraisal of homogenous categories of records, such as those produced by similar types of department or organisation, e.g. financial departments, or by similar types of activities/functions.
- All material for disposal will be dealt with confidentially. On rare occasions it may be offered to other archive service. Deposited material may be offered back to the depositor if a requirement of the deposit agreement.

6 Specific principles and methodology

- 6.1 Appraisal must be carried out within the following legal framework:
 - Freedom of Information Act
 - Data Protection
- 6.2 Appraisal for archival purposes concentrates largely on the historical value of a record, any value for business purposes having been superseded when the collection was deposited in the archive. Historical value can be broken down into two areas: 'evidential value', the way the record documents the history, structure and functions of an organisation; and 'informational value', or value in providing research material on persons, places and subjects.

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- 6.3 Records selected for permanent preservation in the archive should be those which show the significance of the functions and activities of organisations. Items of the highest archival value are those which are most capable of documenting change, continuity and development over time, and of assisting historical interpretation of such changes.
- 6.4 Appraisers should therefore use the following criteria when appraising collections, selecting items which give significant information regarding:
- The history of the organisation or individual, including for institutions their organisation and procedures;
 - The formulation of any policies or legislation and, more selectively, its implementation and interpretation;
 - Notable events or persons, but only when the records add significantly to what is already known;
 - Major events, developments or trends in political, social, legal or economic history;
 - Scientific, technological or medical research and development;
 - Demographic, medical, social, cultural and economic history and historical events;
 - Geography, including by means of statistical and quantitative research.
- 6.5 Appraisers should additionally be aware of potential levels of interest from our main user-groups, and where possible retain material which will add significantly to main topics of research, such as genealogy and local history.
- 6.6 Appraisers should consider keeping material which may not exactly conform to any established criteria, but which does have information which is of interest, or which may be presented in a lively and engaging way.

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- 6.7 All routine or duplicated material should be systematically removed from the collection.
- 6.8 Where possible and practical, all types of records produced by an organisation (and related organisations too if applicable) should be surveyed during appraisal, in order to track or identify sources of information. This will enable items which duplicate information to be selected for disposal.
- 6.9 In some circumstances material may be suitable for long-term preservation by virtue of its suitability for audience development and appraisers should also bear this in mind when appraising ephemeral material.
- 6.10 Sampling: random or other sampling methods should be used pragmatically, with appropriate methodologies implemented which are applicable to the collection under review.
- 6.11 All disposal decisions made after deposit of a collection should be recorded in the electronic catalogue at the appropriate level for the material destroyed, including reasons for disposal – direct duplicate, duplicates information held elsewhere, not considered worthy of permanent preservation.
- 6.12 Regular statistics should be kept to record the amount of material appraised and destroyed, and the amount appraised each month.
- 6.13 For electronic records, The National Archives advises waiting 25 years before deciding which items are of archival value. This is due to the potentially large financial outlay involved in the long-term preservation of such records in an *accessible* form to future generations. In addition computer records may be destroyed inadvertently or by virtue of rapid technological change before appraisal takes place; information about the records, on which appraisal rests, may be lost once they are inactive.