

# Bedfordshire Archives Service Collections Development Policy

## 1. Introduction

A collecting policy plays an “integral part of good practice in managing and caring for archive collections”<sup>1</sup>. This document, forming part of our collecting policy, has been created to support continuing good practice at Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service (henceforth, ‘the service’), and provide guidance in the future shaping of the archives in our care.

The policy aims to define the role of the service in the wider framework of archive collecting (local and national), and to provide clear guidance to potential depositors and to staff. It will thus ensure effective use of resources by minimising duplication of effort and avoiding potential conflict between repositories through overlapping interest.

The document sets out an “ideal policy” covering all collecting situations, i.e. both active (through surveys of specific categories of records leading to deposit) and reactive (merely responding to offers of material). It will assist staff in exercising judgment as to whether to accept or reject material and, as appropriate to advise deposit elsewhere.

## 2. Our role

The service exists to collect, preserve and make available the documentary heritage of the history of Bedfordshire and its people.

We uphold the statutory responsibilities of our three funding bodies (Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council) under the Local Government Act 1972 (s.224), and act in support of their values.

We are a designated place of deposit for local public records under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, and Constitutional Reform and Governance Act, 2010.

We serve as the diocesan record office for the Diocese of St Albans (Archdeaconry of Bedford) under the Parochial Registers and Records Measure, 1978.

We collect and preserve private archives relating to the county in accordance the Local Government (Records) Act 1962, amended 2003.

## 3. Scope of our collecting

No records will be accepted without clear and valid title of ownership.

We will consider any collection of archival material, ephemera or illustrations that documents the topography, ownership, occupation and use of land in Bedfordshire or records or illustrates aspects of human activity in the county.

The geographical boundaries of the policy are the historic county of Bedfordshire (based largely on the 1882 boundaries but taking some account of subsequent county boundary changes where these have been agreed with neighbouring county record offices) and, for Diocesan purposes, the area of the Archdeaconry of Bedford.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/developing-collections.htm>

Records relating to other areas may be accepted on the grounds of preserving archival integrity if they are received with material relating primarily to Bedfordshire. However, the service shall have discretion (with the consent of the depositor) to split group collections of archives and transfer material to other repositories where this course of action is deemed to be appropriate and in the best interests of users.

There are no date limits on material eligible for collection.

We accept records in any physical form or media provided we feel that we have the capabilities to preserve and make them available to the public.

We accept records in some digital formats. Further information on digital deposits can be found in our *Guidelines for depositing digital deposits*.

In the opinion of the archivist(s) evaluating them, all records must be of sufficient quality and condition for permanent preservation.

We collect some microfilm copies and facsimiles of documents held elsewhere where we believe this will considerably support our archival collections. We seek to provide access to online services within our public searchroom and maintain a select library of printed materials to support research relevant to our archive holdings.

## **4. Where our collections come from**

### 4.1 Internal transfer

The core of our collections comes from our three funding bodies, Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council, and their predecessors. Records are transferred from our funding bodies via the records management arm of the service at the end of their retention period if they are known to have, or are considered to have the potential for, long-term historical or legal value.

Retention periods are based on the Local Government Classification Retention Schedule with local adaptations approved by Bedford Borough Council's Information Governance Board and its equivalents in the other two funding authorities.

Records may also be transferred directly to the archives from the originating department on an annual programme. The majority of these records are in hard copy. The transfer of born-digital records matches the timescales used for hard copy records.

### 4.2 External bodies

We accept material from other public bodies, including parish and town councils.

As a place of deposit we accept local records from the court service, coroner, the National Health Service and other bodies identified as producers of public records.

We hold records relating specifically to Bedfordshire from the Diocese of St Albans and its predecessors and from the Anglican parish churches of Bedfordshire, with minor exceptions due to boundary changes.

Private collections come from: businesses, religious bodies, social groups, charities, trusts, families and individuals.

Materials are accepted from external depositors by gift or on long-term loan. The terms which govern the different types of acquisition are described in our *Terms of Deposit* documentation.

Some material is transferred regularly to the service. However, the majority of transfers from external bodies are prompted by change of circumstances such as staff changes, accommodation moves or lack of storage space. Limitations of space and other resources prevent a more proactive approach to transfers by the service.

We seek to maintain strong relationships with our depositors, and this is outlined in our *Advice for Depositors*. Depositors are encouraged to provide finding aids where bulk is likely to render the records otherwise inaccessible until processed.

In certain circumstances the service will acquire collections by purchase where the purchase price is deemed to be an appropriate investment of public funds for the public good.

## **5. Appraisal and disposal**

When materials are received they are appraised to determine their suitability for preservation by the service. The terms for this are explained in our *Appraisal and Disposal Policy*.

In some instances, the suitability of materials previously acquired by the service may come into question. Should this occur they will be subject to a formal appraisal procedure and where necessary, removed from our collections. This process will be undertaken in accordance with our *Appraisal and Disposal Policy*.

The service is committed to making use of past experience in preparing and refining guidelines for the appraisal of particular classes of archives or types of record. Guidelines are expanded and revised on a continual basis in order to facilitate consistent evaluation of records at the point of deposit. Professional judgment will nevertheless continue to be the ultimate determinant in all appraisal.

## **6. Other collecting institutions**

We acknowledge the collecting scope of other organisations, including national and specialist repositories, local museums and other institutions within the Bedfordshire. We seek to cooperate with these organisations to avoid competition or duplication of effort.

We work closely with the local museums in Bedford and Luton. The *Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2002) forms the basis for this cooperation. Since 2013 Luton Museums have been re-examining their archive holdings and their acquisition policy for archive material and have agreed and transferred material to Bedfordshire Archives as a more suitable repository.

## 7. What we do not collect

In some instances, we may refuse materials offered to us. This may be because we lack the correct facilities for long-term preservation, because it is not considered a suitable use of public resources or because the collection is better suited to another collecting institution.

These considerations mean that the service will usually not accept the following types of material:

- three dimensional objects, including specimens
- document containers such as deed chests or picture frames
- literary manuscripts
- works of art of primarily visual interest and appeal
- most publications
- duplicates of documents already held
- film or moving images (traditionally the service has an arrangement with the East Anglian Film Archive to receive moving images)
- analogue sound archives
- digital materials in unsupported formats or media<sup>2</sup>
- archives of large businesses with sufficient resources to preserve and make available their documentary heritage without assistance

Should we refuse a deposit, we will advise depositors on suitable repositories to approach, how to preserve the documents themselves, or how to convert them into supported formats.

## 8. What we seek to collect in the future

We regularly assess our existing collections and recent acquisitions to determine our strengths and weaknesses in relation to documenting as broad a view of life in Bedfordshire as possible. We seek to maintain our strengths and acquire more records for areas we consider under-represented<sup>3</sup>.

Our ongoing priorities for acquisition are as follows:

- Local authority archives
- Town and parish council archives
- Ecclesiastical parish records
- Nonconformist church records
- Family and estate archives
- Title deeds and related documents
- Material on trades specific to Bedfordshire
- Hospital and mental health archives
- Illustrations
- Records of agriculture, husbandry and land management
- Solicitors' records

---

<sup>2</sup> See our *Guidelines for depositing digital deposits* for details on which formats are accepted

<sup>3</sup> Our methods for doing this can be found in our collections development plan

The following areas have been identified as weaknesses in our holdings, and we are therefore keen to receive materials in the following categories:

- Political papers – of parties, societies and politicians
- Records of minority groups
- Local industry and business archives
- Records of pressure groups, including trade unions
- Records of voluntary services
- Clubs and societies' archives
- Modern private archive material

Information on how we will work to improve our collections for the future can be found in our *Collection Development Plan*.

## **9. Review**

This policy was first ratified by Bedfordshire County Council in 1992. It was reviewed and minor revisions made in 2006 and 2009. The policy was reorganised in 2015 however the content remained the same. The policy will be reviewed at least every ten years. The next review is 2025.