

SELECTION AND WEEDING GUIDELINES

The areas of selection/appraisal and weeding are ones where the professional judgement of an archivist is highly exercised.

Selection:

The selection of records for preservation needs to be informed by a number of factors, including:

- a) Potential research value as a class and individually, both now and in the future;
 - b) The bulk and condition of the records concerned;
 - c) An understanding of the relationship between classes;
 - d) A knowledge of the historical significance of the creating individuals and organisations, both at a local level and more widely, and the matters to which the records refer.
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- a) Appraisal for potential research value needs to consider not so much how the material will help current or, indeed future, research trends but what information the records hold that is not available from other sources. Usage needs to be considered in terms of national, regional, local and family historians in all areas of the discipline such as social, economic, political, legal, administrative and topographical.
 - b) Bulk and condition are important not just for the practical considerations of the cost of storage, processing and preservation but also for issues concerning informational value. Often creators of large classes will have created summaries for their own administrative use, and sampling may be a realistic solution to preserve some sense of the individuality of the records over and above such a summary. Theoretical work on the validity of various sampling techniques has been done, and should be used when considering the type to be carried out e.g. random or purposive (see separate internal guidance). Where records are in very poor condition a careful choice has to be made, bearing in mind the cost and likelihood of effective preservation and whether the records, however valuable they may once have been, will ever be capable of having their information extracted in any form.
 - c) It is important to be aware of pure duplication and cases where an apparent duplicate in fact contains additional significant information (e.g. individual financial invoices and bills will often be summarised in higher level records, but the original vouchers may preserve billheads with unique evidence of the appearance of shops).
 - d) It is important to be aware of ones own value judgements and biases in assessing the 'importance' of a person or event, but common sense still demands that we recognise that certain events and people will attract more research interest now and in the future, and judiciously applied this can be a legitimate factor in retention decisions.

Weeding:

Weeding, whereby the contents of a file or bundle, are appraised individually, is a more problematic procedure, and is so time-consuming it should only be carried out after careful consideration. In many ways it could be seen as a form of purposive sampling. Appraisal will normally be at file level or above. A particular problem occurs when multiple copies of an item are found and whilst they would normally be

discarded may have some financial value in themselves. Where a deposit is on loan such duplicates should, of course, be offered back to the depositor, but when they form part of a gift there is a potential clash with section E4 of the policy.

Some specific examples:

Printed material

- Newspapers are kept as a series by the Library Service. Unless individual newspapers in collections have a clear legal importance they should not normally be kept.
- Parish magazines will often contain information not easily available elsewhere and should therefore be kept.
- Printed copies of national magazines should rarely be accepted, especially if the Record Office Library has selected them as titles that will help researchers in the searchroom.
- Bibles and prayer books will not normally be accepted as part of a parish deposit unless there are exceptional circumstances
- Literary material can be accepted in the Record Office if it is predominantly manuscript rather than printed
- Printed OS plans should usually only be accepted if they fill gaps in the Record Office's existing sets for public consultation. However, if they are annotated as part of a bigger archive they may need to be kept.

Duplicates

- Duplicates of items can normally be disposed of. It is not logically necessary to keep one extra 'just in case' as the copy in the archive should be safe. However, it might be justifiable to keep a second copy of an attractive item for exhibition or outreach purposes
- Copies of originals still held elsewhere can be valuable additions, but often it might be possible to consider trying to negotiate the deposit of the original. In any case, the method of the copy should be borne in mind. Large Victorian deeds photocopied in multiple A4 sections may have very little usefulness. However, a scanned image of a rare medieval deed might be of great use.
- Routine papers (e.g. agenda) of other organisations in personal deposits. These usually have no value beyond indicating the areas of interest of the depositor (unless heavily annotated). In this case it may be legitimate to consider other ways to preserve the evidence of this interest. It will be the responsibility of the body represented to consider the best ways to preserve a master set of its records.

Financial records

- Bank books and cheque stubs are not usually of sufficient interest to be retained
- Financial records need very careful consideration. Often there are lots of invoices and papers supporting summary accounts, and these are rarely worth preserving (but see above for a cautionary note).

Title deeds

- Property title deeds from the mid-twentieth century usually contain little information that cannot be found from Land Registration or in other sources (e.g. OS Plans).
- Annual tenancy agreements often have very little evidential value and may be suitable for sampling

Others

- The working notes of local and family historians are usually not of sufficient value to be accepted, unless kept in a very orderly and consistent way, including transcripts and sources, and written in a legible hand or printed out onto good quality paper.
- Disks of information in electronic form need careful consideration as to how they will be accessed now and in the future. It may be appropriate to consider migrating the information to another medium if of sufficient use, but in the case of a database this will clearly not be appropriate and other solutions will have to be considered.
- Photographs, unless they are used evidentially in the collection, should normally, if sufficiently interesting, be added to the Worcestershire Photographic Survey

The appraiser needs to consider the existing strengths of the collections. For example, a series of chemist's prescription books may in itself be of value, but be of lesser value when it is considered the Office already has a number of very good series. Similarly, the Office already holds an extensive run of a Victorian solicitor's letter books, and it is a matter for careful consideration whether a second such run should be accepted.

The Record Office will seek to develop specific retention schemes for some classes of records, in the same way as it creates Retention Schedules for County Council records. Such a scheme already exists for Parish Council records. Gloucestershire Record Office has similar schemes for ecclesiastical parish records and for pre-registration title deeds, which are very useful.