

Collections Development Policy **2010-2013**

Sandwell Community History and Archives Service

1 Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Community History and Archives Service (CHAS) intends to fulfil its role to collect and preserve the history of Sandwell for future generations.

Historically, CHAS has largely adopted a passive rather than active collecting policy. This means that CHAS waits for donors to offer archive material, rather than actively approaching potential depositors in order to solicit deposits.

There have been exceptions to this strategy, notably the acquisition of the Chance Brothers Ltd archive in 2008, which was actively solicited, and the Community History Development Project (CHDP) which ran in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In order to ensure that unique and irreplaceable archive material is not permanently lost, CHAS needs to adopt a more strategic and active approach to collecting. This active collecting needs to be balanced, however, with existing resources, to ensure that new collecting is sustainable.

2 Statutory obligations

CHAS functions as the record office for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council under the Local Government Act 1972 (ss.224-229). As well as collecting Sandwell MBC's own records, CHAS is a place of deposit for public records under the Public Records Acts, 1958 and 1967. Neither the Local Government Act nor the Public Records Acts explicitly require active collecting of material.

CHAS is also a Diocesan Record Office for Warley Deanery in the Diocese of Birmingham under the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978. This Measure requires CHAS to actively collect material through parish inspections which should take place every five years.

3 Customer demand

Over May 2009 we consulted with our Friends Group and regular customers on the kinds of records they would like CHAS to collect. We excluded Church of England parishes from the consultation exercise, as we are required to actively collect these records already. The three highest priorities for our customers were nonconformist churches, schools and industries.

Sandwell has a high black and minority ethnic population, but our customers do not reflect this ethnic mix. In order to document Sandwell's recent history, and attract people from black and minority ethnic communities to use the archives, CHAS also needs to actively collect material relating to these new communities.

4 Factors which restrict collecting

4.1 Storage space

A key restriction to actively collecting archives is the amount of available storage space. The storage space at Smethwick Library and the two outstores is almost full, and the service currently lacks any expansion space. The archives service plans to move to purpose built premises in West Bromwich within the next five years, and is working with Dudley MBC on outstore facilities. These developments will create 25-year expansion space, which will allow a much more proactive approach to archive collecting.

Until this additional space becomes available, large collections, such as extensive Sandwell MBC departmental records, and records of large institutions, cannot be actively collected. Our strategy is therefore to focus on surveying prospective deposits in preparation for our new building.

4.2 Staff capacity

In order to actively promote the service to potential depositors, significant outreach aimed at those depositors is required. Staff time is also needed to carry out negotiation with key depositors, and to continue the depositor relationship in the future, thereby encouraging further deposits.

New deposits of archive material also require staff to process them, from assessing condition and accessioning the material as it comes in, through to box-listing, repackaging, conservation, and full cataloguing.

CHAS currently lacks sufficient staff to carry out outreach and process significant quantities of new acquisitions, therefore the collecting strategy can only focus on what is manageable within existing staffing levels.

5 Collecting strategy

Due to lack of staff capacity and storage space, active collecting must be carefully considered and limited to what is manageable.

With this in mind, our strategy is to:

- Carry out our statutory parish inspections every five years.
- Bring in small, focussed collections relating to black and minority ethnic communities as part of wider outreach projects, developed with suitable partners and using external funding.
- Develop active relationships with a few key internal and external depositors, to encourage a culture of regular depositing.
- Develop a long-term, well-planned, manageable and targeted approach to bring in other collections which are known to be in demand by our customers and / or at risk of destruction.

5.1 What we did 2009-10

- Inspected all 12 parishes within the Deanery of Warley.
- Acquired the oral histories of black and minority ethnic shop-keepers through the Corner Shop Project.
- Collected the archives of West Bromwich Methodist Circuit.
- Collected the archives of schools which have now become academies.
- Monitored local news media for reports of businesses closing in order to be prepared to solicit deposits.

5.2 Priorities for 2010-2011

- To formalise the relationship with the magistrates court.
- To develop a mailing list for key depositors.
- To acquire material relating to black and minority ethnic people through targeted projects.
- To survey the records still in Wednesbury and Tipton primary schools.
- To contact Baptist churches within Sandwell to make them aware of CHAS.
- To monitor local news media for reports of businesses closing and solicit deposits.

5.3 Priorities for 2011-2013

- To formalise relationships with other depositors of public records.
- To secure external funding for projects to acquire material relating to black and minority ethnic people.
- To survey the records of all Sandwell primary and secondary schools.

- To contact other non-conformist churches within Sandwell to make them aware of CHAS.
- To monitor local news media for reports of businesses closing and solicit deposits.
- To work towards increasing storage capacity by moving CHAS to new premises in West Bromwich with outstorage at Dudley Archives.

6 Review

This policy will be reviewed annually. The next review will take place in March 2011.