

Digital Preservation Policy

Version 3

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Contents

PURPOSE	3
MANDATE.....	3
SCOPE.....	3
OUT OF SCOPE	4
POLICY PRINCIPLES	4
ORGANISATIONAL VIABILITY	5
POLICY AND STRATEGY	5
LEGAL BASIS.....	5
IT CAPABILITY	5
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	6
COMMUNITY.....	6
ACQUISITION, TRANSFER AND INGEST	6
BITSTREAM PRESERVATION	7
CONTENT PRESERVATION	7
METADATA MANAGEMENT	7
DISCOVERY AND ACCESS	8
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	8
RESPONSIBLE.....	8
ACCOUNTABLE	9
CONSULTED.....	10
INFORMED.....	11
STANDARDS AND MODELS	12
SUSTAINABILITY	12
RISK ASSESSMENT.....	13
RELATED DOCUMENTS	13
GLOSSARY.....	13
CONTACT	17

Purpose

This policy sets out The Postal Museum's commitment to the acquisition and preservation of born-digital collections, and making them available to the public. This policy forms one element of our collections management framework and should be read in conjunction with other collections management policies including the Archive Collections Development Policy 2025, TPM Collections Development Policy v2, the Archive Collections Access Policy 2024, and the Archive Collections Information Policy 2024.

If digital collections are not identified, managed, and preserved we risk not having the content to make accessible for future audiences such as: research, use in exhibitions, and the creation of multi-platform content. The digital landscape, and therefore digital preservation, changes rapidly. Therefore our practice in this area requires ongoing resourcing, active monitoring, and continuous improvement.

This policy reflects current practices. Where appropriate it will reference plans for future development. This will be clearly indicated.

Mandate

The Postal Museum tells the story of postal communication and its impact on a global society. Collecting and preserving born-digital materials ensures source material is available to tell the story of postal communications in the late 1900s and the 2000s. It fulfils our obligations to both current and future audiences.

The Postal Museum cares of the records of Royal Mail Group (RMG) and Post Office Limited (POL) under the terms of an Archive Service Agreement. This agreement supports the businesses in meeting their obligations under the Public Records Act 1958. The Postal Museum also cares for its own archive to support its corporate memory, accountability and decision making.

Scope

This policy deals with born-digital materials which are selected or offered for preservation in the museum or archive collection.

This policy covers born-digital records created by Royal Mail and Post Office Limited which are transferred to the archive for permanent preservation in line with the criteria set out in the Operational Selection Policy 51 and the businesses respective retention schedules.

It also covers born-digital records created by The Postal Museum which are identified for transfer to the archive in line with The Postal Museum's retention schedule.

It also includes born-digital material offered to the museum collection such as oral histories, audio visual files, digital photographs, and born digital files which support the Museum's physical collections.

Digital records will be subject to the same criteria and considered against the same priority collection targets as physical formats. These are set out in the Archive Collection Development Policy 2025 and the Collections Development Policy v2.

OUT OF SCOPE

Digitised records (digital copies of material held in analogue form) are not in scope of this policy. The only exception is in the case of digitised versions of records where the analogue version is no longer in existence, or where the location is unknown.

Records which have not been identified for transfer to the archive collection are out of scope of this policy. In some cases these records may have long retention periods and the creating organisation should consider how to ensure the records remain accessible and authentic for the duration of their retention period.

Web archiving is out of scope of this policy. The UK Government Web Archive hosted by The National Archives (UK) collects <https://postoffice.co.uk>, and <https://corporate.postoffice.co.uk>. The UK Web Archive (hosted by The British Library) collects <https://royalmail.com>, and <https://postalmuseum.org>.

Social media and intranet sites (such as SharePoint) are not currently collected but remain under consideration.

Policy principles

The Postal Museum takes a proactive and risk-managed approach to digital preservation. It recognises that preserving access to digital collections requires ongoing planning, active management, and organisational commitment from the point of creation or accession.

ORGANISATIONAL VIABILITY

The Postal Museum is committed to the preservation of digital collections. It has invested in a digital preservation system to preserve and manage its digital collections, initially for a period of five years (until August 2028) with plans to extend.

The Archivist (Digital Preservation) will work with the Senior Archivist, Senior Curator and the Head of Collections to ensure digital preservation is embedded into The Postal Museum's collections management work. All processes will be documented, and training provided to collections staff to ensure skills are shared across the team.

POLICY AND STRATEGY

Policies, guidelines, procedures, standards, processes, and workflows developed to support acquisition and preservation activities for digital content are documented and made available to all collections staff.

LEGAL BASIS

Ownership, provenance, and intellectual property rights will be ascertained and documented at the point of acquisition.

Access conditions, copyright and/or rights are adhered to when managing, preserving, and providing access to digital content. Appropriate practices are established to manage personal and sensitive data, and compliance with data privacy regulations.

Access to archive records will be subject to the 20-year rule.

Researchers and other users will be made aware of intellectual property rights when accessing digital materials.

IT CAPABILITY

The Postal Museum has invested in a digital preservation system to preserve and manage digital collections until at least 2028, with a review plan in place. Exit planning was factored into the procurement process for the digital preservation system.

The Archivist (Digital Preservation) maintains a watching brief on developments in the digital preservation marketplace to inform the review of the digital preservation system.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Postal Museum acknowledges that digital preservation is a rapidly changing area which requires regular upskilling and review of processes.

The Postal Museum will undertake the Digital Preservation Coalition's Rapid Assessment Model on an annual basis to monitor its current position and plan future priorities.

It also acknowledged that in a constantly changing environment, significant (financial and staff) resource is required to maintain a status quo.

COMMUNITY

The Postal Museum is an Associate member of the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC). The Archivist (Digital Preservation) regularly attends training sessions and working groups. They also often gives presentations about the museum's digital preservation activities at DPC events.

The Postal Museum is also building relationships with other heritage bodies using the same digital preservation system in order to share experience.

Digital preservation activities are communicated to the wider museum staff via the Staff memo, drop in question and answer sessions and World Digital Preservation Day activities.

ACQUISITION, TRANSFER AND INGEST

The Postal Museum will adopt a pragmatic approach to the acquisition of digital records, working within the constraints and requirements of the transferring bodies.

The Postal Museum will work closely with the businesses to advocate for the importance of digital preservation and the prompt transfer of records identified in the businesses retention schedules. It will also work with colleagues across The Postal Museum to ensure records identified in the museum's retention schedule are transferred to the archive.

Offers of donation from members of the public will be considered in line with the Collections Development policy v2. Transfer processes will be agreed with the depositor, taking into account technical skills required and maintaining the authenticity of the content.

All digital content should be ingested into the Digital Preservation System as soon as possible after transfer. Where appropriate the Digital Preservation System's External Submissions functionality should be used for the transfer.

Ideally digital acquisitions will be accessioned and catalogued at the point of transfer. Where this is not possible, due to the size or complexity of the content, or staff resources, the content should be ingested into a folder for future appraisal or cataloguing. This will ensure that the content is preserved pending cataloguing.

BITSTREAM PRESERVATION

The Digital Preservation System monitors integrity on an ongoing basis. As a default it generates SHA-256 checksums for newly ingested content.

Checksums generated prior to the acquisition of the Digital Preservation System have been ingested into the system to provide a complete audit trail.

Content is stored in AWS Cloud storage based in the United Kingdom. Three copies of all content are stored, to enable damaged content to be easily restored.

CONTENT PRESERVATION

Where possible, files should be transferred to The Postal Museum in their original format. The original file will be maintained in the Digital Preservation System.

Preservation copies will be created by the Digital Preservation System in line with the Content Preservation Policy v2.

Access copies will also be created for content which is publicly accessible. These will be in line with the Access Representation Policy.

In very rare cases (for example proprietary databases) it may not be possible to carry out full content preservation. The Postal Museum will avoid collecting in these cases, unless there is an overriding justification for collection. If this category of content has been acquired in the past, it will be stored in the digital preservation system with bitstream preservation only.

METADATA MANAGEMENT

Information relating to the depositor of digital content, its context, and administrative history will be recorded in the Collections Management System. This should include an Entry number, information relating to the transfer process, and any further information required to understand and interpret the content.

Preservation actions will be recorded in the Digital Preservation System. Depending on the type of action, these can be reviewed in the audit log (which is checked on a monthly basis), or in the preservation history of the relevant content.

Descriptive metadata will use the Dublin Core schema and will be recorded at the finding number/Entry number/Accession number level in the Digital Preservation System. As far as possible this should reflect the descriptive metadata held in the Collections Management System.

DISCOVERY AND ACCESS

Use of and access to The Postal Museum's collections are the guiding purposes of its existence.

Access to archive material will be in line with the 20-year rule. Access to museum material will be in line with agreements with the depositor. In both cases access may be restricted in line with Data Protection legislation.

Digital content will be catalogued as set out in the Archive Information Policy 2024. It will be discoverable via the online catalogue.

It is intended to provide access to digital content which is public via an online Portal. If intellectual property rights prohibit making content available online, access will be provided via a dedicated terminal in the Archive space.

Roles and responsibilities

RESPONSIBLE

Curator (Collections Management)

- Lead responsibility for overseeing curatorial engagement with digital preservation.
- Responsible for making collections management decisions with regard to digital content, with support from the Senior Curator as required.

Collections staff

- Responsible for the acquisition and preservation of born-digital material in line with established processes, with support from the Archivist (Digital Preservation) as required.
- Responsible for their own CPD, taking account of digital preservation responsibilities.

ACCOUNTABLE

Archivist (Digital Preservation)

- Has overall responsibility for digital preservation including setting overall digital preservation policy.
- Responsible for the management and maintenance of the digital preservation system, including setting user roles, security tags, and preservation policies.
- Lead responsibility for managing born-digital archive collections, including acquiring new content, ingesting, monitoring, preservation, and access.
- Responsible for engaging with Royal Mail Group, Post Office Limited, and internally to secure the transfer of born-digital records.
- Responsible for providing training and support to the Collections team to develop skills.
- Responsible for documenting processes and workflows.

Senior Archivist

- Responsible for ensuring appropriate staffing and development resources available to enable the preservation of born-digital archive collections to appropriate standards.
- Responsible for supporting the Archivist (Digital Preservation) in promoting digital preservation work across the Collections team.
- Responsible for managing the relationship with Royal Mail Group and Post Office Limited to ensure the value of born-digital records is recognised and relevant records are transferred to the archive in a timely fashion.

Senior Curator

- Responsible for ensuring appropriate staffing and development resources available to enable the preservation of born-digital museum collections to appropriate standards.
- Responsible for Collections Management decisions relating to digital preservation, including ensuring appropriate documentation.

Head of Collections

- Responsible for ensuring The Postal Museum has appropriately skilled and equipped staff to preserve and make available born-digital collections.
- Responsible for ensuring adequate budget is allocated to digital preservation, including the digital preservation system and training (largely via membership of Digital Preservation Coalition).

- Responsible for advocating for the transfer of relevant records generated by The Postal Museum to the archive, in line with the retention schedule. The bulk of these records are digital and will be require digital preservation. This responsibility falls to the Head of Collections in the absence of a dedicated records management role in the archive team.

CONSULTED

IT & Systems Manager

- Consulted on cyber security with relation to digital preservation activities including audit reporting and user roles.
- Consults the Archivist (Digital Preservation) in discussions regarding new IT systems for The Postal Museum to ensure record keeping and preservation considerations are factored in at the point of record creation.

Royal Mail and Post Office Limited Cyber Security teams

- Will be consulted on cyber security elements of the Digital Preservation System. This will include any new functionality which may impact on the security of data (such as the external submissions functionality).
- Will be consulted on the procurement of a new Digital Preservation System, or the renewal of the contract with the existing supplier.
- Will support the transfer of selected born-digital records to The Postal Museum. This may include allowing access to relevant systems to capture the records and ensuring encryption keys are transferred together with the records they relate to. Where possible they will factor record keeping considerations into procurement of new IT systems, drawing on advice from The Postal Museum as required.

Post Office Limited (POL) Digital/Physical Records Manager and Departmental Records Officer (DRO)

- Will be consulted on all matters relating to the digital preservation of POL records by The Postal Museum. This will include the transfer, ingest, preservation, and access to these records.
- Will consult The Postal Museum on the selection of records for transfer to the archive.
- Will be consulted on the management of the digital preservation system including security tags and user roles.
- Will be consulted on the Digital Preservation Policy.

Royal Mail Head of Privacy Governance and Culture (Interim)

- Will be consulted on all matters relating to the digital preservation of Royal Mail records by The Postal Museum. This will include the transfer, ingest, preservation, and access to these records.
- Will consult The Postal Museum on the selection of records for transfer to the archive.
- Will be consulted on the management of the digital preservation system including security tags and user roles.
- Will be consulted on the Digital Preservation Policy.

INFORMED

The Postal Museum record owners

- All record owners will be aware of the Digital Preservation Policy v3 and understand how it and The Postal Museum retention schedule v1.7 impact on the management and disposition of their records.

The Postal Museum Board

- Will be aware of the policy and its importance of digital preservation to ensuring the collections reflect stories of communication in the twenty first century.

Royal Mail Group record owners

- All record owners will be aware of the Digital Preservation Policy v3 and will identify and transfer their records to The Postal Museum in line with organisational retention schedules and the Operational Selection Policy 51.
- The Postal Museum will prioritise the acquisition of records from key departments which have been identified as, the Company Secretary's Office, Finance, Legal, Comms, Stamps and Collectibles, Human Resources, and Information Technology teams.

Post Office Limited record creators

- All record creators will be aware of the Digital Preservation Policy v3 and will identify and transfer their records to The Postal Museum in line with organisational retention schedules and the Operational Selection Policy 51.
- The Postal Museum will prioritise the acquisition of records from key departments which have been identified as, the Company Secretary's Office, Finance, Legal, Comms, Human Resources, and Information Technology teams.

Museum depositors

- Museum depositors will be made aware of the Digital Preservation Policy v.3 and its implications for the acquisition, preservation, and access to any material they offer to the museum.

The National Archives (UK)

- The National Archives (UK) will be informed of the Digital Preservation Policy via the Archive Service Accreditation process. The policy will be made available for them on request at any time.

The general public

- The Digital Preservation Policy will be published on The Postal Museum's website. It will be available on request via email or hard copy for any member of the public who is unable to access the website.

Standards and models

The Postal Museum will follow good practice in the sector as recommended by the Digital Preservation Coalition, and The National Archives (UK). Digital preservation practice will meet the requirements of Archive Service Accreditation.

Sustainability

The Postal Museum is committed to funding digital preservation via:

- A dedicated member of the archive team to provide lead responsibility for digital preservation.
- Budget for a Digital Preservation System until at least 2028.
- Membership of the Digital Preservation Coalition, providing training and support.

The Postal Museum has a commitment to net zero emissions by 2040. Digital preservation will take place in the context of this commitment. In particular consideration will be given to storing some collections material in cold (off line) storage, consideration of the frequency of preservation actions, the number of copies stored, and the impact of using Artificial Intelligence. The Postal Museum will engage with suppliers to better understand the carbon impact of its digital preservation activities. Staff will continue to engage with community discussions of these matters.

Risk Assessment

Changes to the priorities of either or both Royal Mail and Post Office Limited may curtail the transfer of born-digital records to the archive.

A particular area of concern is the lack of a named individual with defined Departmental Record Officer responsibilities within Royal Mail. This may impact on ownership of recordkeeping issues (including digital recordkeeping) within the organisation and the ability of The Postal Museum to engage the relevant teams in this project.

A further risk is staff capacity within The Postal Museum. The reliance on the Archivist (Digital Preservation) to manage the digital preservation system and oversee digital preservation activities may pose risks for succession planning.

Related documents

[The Postal Museum Forward Plan 2023-2029](#)

Archive Collection Development Policy 2025

[Collections Development Policy v2](#)

[Archive Service Accreditation](#)

[Archive Services Agreement with Royal Mail and Post Office Limited](#)

IT and Cyber Security Policy v2

[Operational Selection Policy 51](#)

[Environmental Sustainability Framework 2023-2029](#)

The Postal Museum Risk Register

[Archive Collections Access Policy 2024](#)

Glossary

Term	Definition
20-year rule	The Public Records Act requires central government departments, and certain other public bodies (such as Royal Mail and Post Office), to identify records of historical value and transfer them for permanent preservation to an appointed place of

	deposit (such as The Postal Museum), by the time they are 20 years old.
AWS Cloud	AWS (Amazon Web Services) cloud is a data centre (storage facility) operated by Amazon. Our Digital Preservation System uses AWS Cloud for data storage.
Bitstream preservation	A term used to denote a very basic level of preservation of digital resource as it was submitted (literally preservation of the bits forming a digital resource). It may include maintaining onsite and offsite backup copies, virus checking, fixity-checking, and periodic refreshment to new storage media. Bit preservation is not digital preservation but it does provide one building block for the more complete set of digital preservation practices and processes that ensure the survival of digital content and also its usability, display, context and interpretation over time
Born-digital	Refers to a record which has never had an analogue equivalent.
Checksum	A unique numerical signature derived from a file. Used to compare copies.
Collections Management System	Software used to organise, manage, and control an organisation's collections. It includes entry records, depositor records, accession records, catalogue records, and location records.
Content preservation	The preservation of the meaning, usability, and functionality of digital content over time.
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	CPD refers to training or on the job learning which builds on any professional qualifications and ensures staff remain aware of current good practice. It also ensures staff are appropriately skilled to carry out digital preservation activities.
Departmental Records Officer (DRO)	The Departmental Record Officer (DRO) leads on compliance with the Public Records Act and plays an important role in the management of information within government departments.

Digital preservation	Refers to the series of managed activities necessary to ensure continued access to digital materials for as long as necessary.
Digital Preservation System Rapid Assessment Model	The DPC's Rapid Assessment Model (DPC RAM) is a digital preservation maturity modelling tool that has been designed to enable rapid benchmarking of an organisation's digital preservation capability and facilitate continuous improvement over time.
Digital Preservation System	A digital preservation system stores digital content and associated metadata (technical and descriptive). It manages access to that content via user roles and security tags. It also carries out migrations (changes of file format) on the content in line with established policies.
Digitised (made digital)	Refers to digital records created from an analogue equivalent. This fall into two further categories: Digitised records where the analogue version is preserved. This type of made digital record is often created for access purposes. This type of material is out of scope of this policy. Digitised records where the analogue version has been destroyed or is no longer available to the collecting institution.
Dublin Core	Dublin core is a metadata standard for describing any type of collection.
External submissions	This is part of the functionality of the Digital Preservation System. It allows record owners or depositors to submit born-digital content to the collection through a weblink.
Fixity check	Refers to a method for ensuring the integrity of a file and verifying it has not been altered or corrupted. During transfer, an archive may run a fixity check to ensure a transmitted file has not been altered en-route. Within the archive, fixity checking is

	used to ensure that digital files have not been altered or corrupted. It is most often accomplished by computing checksums such as MD5, SHA1 or SHA256 for a file and comparing them to a stored value. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File_Fixity
Ingest	This refers to uploading content to the digital preservation system. Various checks are carried out during the ingest process such as virus check, file format identification, and fixity checking.
Intellectual Property	Refers to copyright, designs, patents and trademarks which provide the creator with protection against other people stealing or copying the names of products, inventions, the design or look of products, or things the creator writes, makes, or produces.
Metadata	Basically 'data about data'. Used to refer to structured data associated with the content to assist its management and use. Examples include creator, date, format, and checksum values.
Net zero	Net zero refers to a state in which the greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere are balanced by removal out of the atmosphere (What is Net Zero? - Net Zero Climate)
Operational Selection Policy 51	Operational Selection Policies are tools for those involved in the selection and appraisal of Public Records. They set out key functions and what records relating to that function will be collected. OSP 51 relates to the records of Royal Mail and Post Office Limited 1969-2006.
Permanent preservation	Continued access to digital materials, or at least to the information contained in them, indefinitely.
Portal	The Portal is a functionality within the Digital Preservation System to make selected content available to the public via a website.

	Depending on context it may also be referred to as The Postal Museum's Digital Collections Portal, or the Digital Collections Portal.
Public Records	Public records are created, or acquired in the course of their business, by a body subject to the Public Records Act. Both Post Office Limited and Royal Mail are covered by the Public Records Act.
Retention schedule	A retention schedule sets out how long specific record types need to be kept and what should happen at the end of that period. For the purposes of this policy, records with an end of period action of 'offer to archive' or 'transfer to archive' are most relevant.
Security tag	Security tags are assigned to content in the Digital Preservation System. They control access to that content and its associated metadata.
User Role	User roles are assigned to users in the Digital Preservation System. They control what content a user can view and what they can do with that content (view, read metadata, update metadata etc.)
Web archiving	Web archiving is the process of collecting websites and the information that they contain from the World Wide Web, and preserving these in an archive.
World Digital Preservation Day	World Digital Preservation Day is the first Thursday of November. It is an occasion to celebrate and advocate for digital preservation.

Contact

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