

Archive Collections Development Policy

Archive Team
25/11/2025

Contents

1. Purpose
2. Background
3. Legislative context and statement of ownership
4. Scope
 - 4.1 What are archives?
 - 4.2 Dates
 - 4.3 Format
 - 4.4 Condition
 - 4.5 Duplicates
 - 4.6 Philatelic Collections
 - 4.7 Museum Collection
 - 4.8 Data protection
5. How do we collect?
 - 5.1 Ad-hoc or routine transfers from the business
 - 5.2 Records retention schedules
 - 5.3 Registries and Records Centre
 - 5.4 Donations
 - 5.5 Loans
 - 5.6 Purchases
 - 5.7 Films
 - 5.8 Photographs
 - 5.9 Appraisal
 - 5.10 Deaccessioning
6. Approach to collections development
7. Archive of TPM and its predecessors
8. Responsibility for the archive
9. Implementation and Review

Appendix A – Royal Mail Philatelic Collections. Requirement of Collections

Appendix B – Records held elsewhere relating to postal operations and telecommunications

1. Purpose

British postal heritage has touched the lives of countless millions throughout history; it has helped to shape the modern world and the heritage that The Postal Museum preserves helps tell this story. The Royal Mail Archive together with the Museum Collections are a unique testament to the role played by postal services and the post office network in the development of modern Britain and the world.

The archive supports the museum in its vision to explore stories around communication, and to inspire everyone to make richer and more meaningful connections in their lives.

The archive also encapsulates the corporate memory of Royal Mail Group (RMG), including Parcelforce Worldwide; and Post Office Limited (POL). It is an important business asset that assists RMG and POL in meeting their informational, legal and regulatory requirements. It can also benefit the businesses in other ways, providing a source of inspiration for their brands via the records that it contains, and the stories that can be told through them.

The Postal Museum has its own archive, which documents its governance, management and operation. Further information about it can be found in section 7.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure that the archive continues to reflect the evolving story of postal communications and the post office network and remains relevant to the audience of today and tomorrow
- Ensure that the archive continues to be a business asset to RMG and POL and enables them to meet their legal, regulatory and informational needs
- Ensure that RMG and POL meet their obligations under the Public Records Acts
- Ensure that the archive is correctly managed to ensure its long-term survival and sustainability
- Provide an overview of what the archive consists of and what will be collected
- Ensure that the museum records its own history enabling it to meet its own legal, regulatory and informational needs

2. Background

RMG, POL and their predecessors have been responsible for an archive service since the 1890s. The archive was originally kept at GPO North, the administrative headquarters of the General Post Office, until 1984 when it was rehoused at Freeling House, Glass Hill Street, Southwark, South London. In 1991, it moved to Freeling House, Phoenix Place, the site of the former Mount Pleasant boiler room, which was converted into an archive store. The archive was part of RMG until 2004 when the Postal Heritage Trust (PHT) was established as an independent educational charity to manage the archive and promote access to the Museum Collection. TPM is the public face of the charity. The archive moved to two purpose-built repositories at The Postal Museum in July 2017.

The archive is Designated by the Arts Council England as being of outstanding national and international importance under its Designation Scheme. It has been presented with Archive Accreditation Status by The National Archives (TNA)¹. Films created by the GPO Film Unit, 1933-1940, and the Royal Mail Archive, 1637-1969 were added to the UNESCO Memory of the World register in 2011 and 2014 respectively. It is also one of the oldest business archives in the world.

3. Legislative context and statement of ownership

Records of RMG and POL are designated public records under section 10 (1) and the First Schedule of the [1958 Public Records Act \(as amended, 1967\)](#). The Lord Chancellor designated the archive service as a place of deposit under section 4 (1) of the act, which has been confirmed by TNA².

In 2011, RMG and POL became legally separate companies with the former being privatised on 15 October 2013 and the latter remaining in public ownership. Both companies continue to produce public records. RMG and POL both own, and retain overall responsibility under the act, for the public records within the archive.

The archive is managed on behalf of RMG and POL by PHT and Postal Heritage Services Limited under a legal services agreement³. Objectives concerning the management of the archive are set annually in consultation with RMG and POL and discussed at quarterly meetings with the respective Departmental Records Officers/Archive Service Agreement contract managers. Under [section 12](#) of the [Postal Services Act 2011](#), RMG in consultation with POL, is required to submit a report about the archive to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Due to the shared history of RMG and POL, certain records within the archive are owned by both businesses. Where possible any new records transferred to the archive will be identified as belonging to either RMG or POL, thereby allowing for a clarity of rights.

All public record material is managed in accordance with public record legislation and the standards, policies and guidelines issued by TNA. The storage and exhibition of records from the archive are managed in accordance with the *Conservation and Care of archive and library collections* (BS 4971:2017) and the *Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections* (BS EN 16893:2018). The Digital Preservation System is compliant with *Information security, cyber security, and privacy protection – Information security management systems - Requirements* (ISO 27001:2022). The archive is subject to regular inspections by TNA to ensure that it meets the

¹ It was awarded archive accreditation status for the first time on 17 March 2019. Following a review, it retained that status, which was confirmed on 6 July 2022. All accredited archive services must reapply after six years to retain their accredited status. The archive was awarded accreditation for the second time on 8 July 2025.

² Place of deposit status was confirmed in a letter dated 26 July 2018 and reconfirmed on 18 August 2025.

³ Known as the Archive Services Agreement and signed on 28 March 2013. The agreement ends on the last business day of March 2040. Renewal will be sought in the run up to its expiry.

conditions required for its place of deposit status. The framework provided by the Archive Service Accreditation standard helps direct the overall management of the archive service.

4. Scope

4.1 What are archives?

Archives are records created or received by an individual person, family, or organisation during their day to day business which have been selected for permanent preservation because of the enduring value of the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator.

We collect, care for and provide access to public records created or received by RMG, POL and their predecessor bodies; Consignia, the Post Office Corporation, and the General Post Office. This is because under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, RMG and POL must select, preserve and make accessible their historic public records. The archive will also collect and care for records created or received by RMG after its privatisation in October 2013. In addition to records, we also collect publications, such as the staff magazine *The Courier*.

The Archive occupies two and a half miles or four kilometres of shelving, and approximately 640GB of cloud storage (August 2025) containing records dating from 1637 to the present day. It covers the collection and delivery of mail both at home and abroad, the provision of counter and financial services, and broadcasting.

It includes:

- Extensive run of staff records for one of the country's largest employers, including appointment books and pension records, which are particularly good from 1859 until 1959
- Variety of records relating to the design and production of stamps and related philatelic products
- Nearly 800 maps including some detailing postal routes and the way in which mail was transported
- Over 2000 architectural plans covering Post Office properties in London and throughout the United Kingdom
- Almost 7000 posters along with nearly 700 pieces of original poster artwork from the 1930s to the present day, advertising products and services by notable artists such as Edward Bawden, Vanessa Bell, Tom Eckersley, Abram Games, Grace Golden, Edward McKnight Kauffer and Mildred Ratcliffe
- Over 10,000 publicity photographs from throughout the 20th century covering all aspects of Post Office activity

Treasures include a first edition of James Joyce's 'Ulysses', telegrams regarding the Titanic's sinking, evidence from the Great Train Robbery and a file documenting an incident involving two suffragettes attempting to send themselves via the post to the prime minister at 10 Downing Street.

For more in-depth guidance see [Operational Selection Policy OSP 51 Records of Royal Mail and its predecessors 1969-2006](#).

4.2 Dates

No date limits are imposed on records that meet the criteria for inclusion within the archive.

4.3 Format

The archive consists primarily of physical items. These include both bound and sheet material, original artwork, printed posters, maps, plans, photographic media, microfilm and stamps.

Records are being increasingly created in digital formats (born digital) and the archive will collect, manage, and make available these records to ensure its continuing relevance to the businesses and the wider user community. Digital records will be subject to the same criteria and considered against the same priority collection targets as physical formats. They are accepted on the understanding that the ultimate aim is to make them available for consultation alongside physical records. Digital records will need to be identified and potentially transferred earlier than paper records as they require more active preservation to ensure their survival.

Records will be accepted in any format if we can preserve and provide access to them. Where possible digital records should be collected in their original file format as this increases the likelihood of relevant metadata being retained.

4.4 Condition

Records intended for the archive should be in a sufficiently satisfactory condition to ensure their long-term preservation. Before a record in poor condition, which otherwise meets the collecting conditions set out within this policy, can be accepted into the archive, it must first be examined by a conservator. The record will only be accepted into the archive if the Conservator (working with the Senior Archivist) is satisfied that it can be cared for subject to budgetary and storage constraints. All records in need of conservation will be subjected to the conservation priority system. Further information on how records are cared for can be found in the *Collections Care and Conservation Policy* and *Collection Care and Conservation Plan*.

Digital records will ideally be collected unencrypted and uncompressed. If this is not possible encryption keys/passwords should be provided alongside the content, and any compression should be lossless. If a digital record is corrupted, or in an unusual file format, the Archivist (Digital Preservation) will assess the resources required to preserve and provide access to the content, the historical significance of the content, and whether this information is available elsewhere. If a disproportionate amount of resource is required to preserve this format, the records will not be accepted into the archive.

4.5 Duplicates

Duplicates will not usually be accepted into the archive. However, there are some exceptions. A duplicate will be retained permanently if it forms part of a file and destroying it would compromise the integrity of that file, if it contains significant annotations that provide a greater understanding of what is being documented, or if it is in better condition than the one already within the archive. Some duplicates of material, particularly posters and publications, are kept so that they can be used in

exhibitions or for ease of access in the public Archive space. The Postal Museum also has a handling collection that accepts duplicate material that will assist in the delivery of the museum's learning programme.

4.6 Philatelic Collections

The Philatelic Collections contain the following public record material:

The Official Collection – sheets of all British stamps produced from the Penny Black (the world's first postage stamp in 1840) through to the present day, original artwork, un-adopted designs and products associated with stamps, such as first day covers and presentation packs.

The Phillips Collection – Specialised collection of British Victorian stamps donated by R M Phillips including proofs, essays and artwork from the 1d black onwards.

The "Berne" Universal Postal Union Collection - Stamps as issued by all member countries of the Universal Postal Union from 1874 to 1995.

See Appendix A for a list of the type of philatelic material being collected today.

4.7 Museum Collection

The archive does not usually accept objects unless they form an integral part of the record being accepted. Objects will usually be referred or transferred to the Museum Collection. Further information about objects can be found in the [Collections Development Policy](#).

4.8 Data protection

Data protection legislation only applies to personal data relating to those who are alive. Therefore, it will not apply to all personal data held within the Royal Mail Archive. However, as historically RMG, POL and their predecessors have employed large numbers of people and played such an integral role in the economic and social life of the United Kingdom, it is inevitable that the archive may include personal data relating to living persons. In fact, one of its strengths is that it can document the role that postal services have played in the lives of its employees and those that it has provided products and services to. Data protection legislation recognises that there is a public interest in retaining personal data permanently for the long-term benefit of society. Therefore, the presence of personal and sensitive personal data within a record will not be considered a barrier to its inclusion within the archive.

Personal and sensitive personal data will be handled responsibly and in accordance with data protection legislation, following guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office on research provisions (<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/the-research-provisions>. Accessed 12 August 2025) and guidance issued by The National Archives, (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/legislation/data-protection/>. Accessed 12 August 2025).

See Archive Access and Archive Information Policies for further information (available upon request).

5. How do we collect?

Records are acquired as follows:

5.1 Ad-hoc or routine transfers from the businesses

- Member of staff leaving the business, or a department or office move.
- Some records, such as those relating to certain boards and committees, have been identified for permanent retention and are transferred to the archive at the earliest opportunity.
- Proactively approaching RMG and POL for records.

5.2 Records retention schedules

Records identified as being suitable for transfer on the records retention schedules of RMG and POL will be passed to the archive at the end of their retention periods. Any that are identified as being of potential historic value (i.e. these are noted on the schedules as Offer to TPM (The Postal Museum)) will be assessed by the Archives and Records Management Team in consultation with the appropriate Departmental Records Officer.

5.3 Registries and Records Centre

Files created under the Registries and Records Centre systems are reviewed to see if they should be transferred for permanent retention in the archive.

5.4 Donations

Donations are accepted from the public or former RMG and POL members of staff and their families. All donations must be accompanied by a Transfer of Title so that we can prove that we have a legal claim to them. The decision to accept or reject ad-hoc donations from the public or former members of staff and their families will be made by the Archivist (Cataloguing) with input from the Senior Archivist acting on behalf of the Departmental Records Officers.

5.5 Loans

Records are not accepted on loan except for exhibitions.

5.6 Purchases

Purchases will only be made of records of significant importance to the archive.

5.7 Films

Films are accepted. These are preserved and managed by the British Film Institute (BFI) on behalf of the archive.

5.8 Photographs

Photographs created by RMG or POL will be considered for the archive. Those that have not been created by the businesses will usually be offered to the Museum Collection.

5.9 Appraisal

All records can be considered of potential archival value. However, an archive needs to be able to preserve records forever and must therefore limit what it collects to those records with the highest archival importance. Appraisal is vital in ensuring that the correct resources are assigned towards records being kept permanently. Any records offered to the archive will be appraised for inclusion based on their uniqueness, condition, size and whether they fit within the collecting criteria set out within this policy and in *Operational Selection Policy OSP 51 Records of Royal Mail and its predecessors 1969-2006*. Records that do not fit within these parameters will not be accepted.

During the appraisal process it may become apparent that not every record should become part of the archive. If this is the case, the record(s) in question will either be returned to the depositor, the business will be consulted as to what should be done, it will be transferred to another organisation or securely destroyed. Records will only be transferred once permission from TNA, RMG and POL has been received, and an agreement has been signed between the archive and receiving party.

5.10 Deaccessioning

Once a record has been accessioned and catalogued, unless a duplicate has been identified, there would need to be a compelling reason for deaccessioning a record (i.e. removing it from the archive and disposing of it). Issues of space and budget would not be considered sufficient reasons for doing so. Were any deaccessioning to take place, permission would be obtained from TNA, RMG and POL and it would be carried out in accordance with TNA's *Deaccessioning and disposal: Guidance for archive services* (2015).

6. Approach to collections development

Past collecting policies have not always been well defined. As a result, there may be some material within the archive that would not fit in with our current collecting policy. However, this policy should inform all future decision making on acquisitions.

The service is devoted to collecting the business archives of RMG and POL. The primary collecting focus of the archive is records or publications created or received by RMG and POL. Any records or publications that fall under this definition and that are given to us by former customers or staff will become part of the archive and will therefore be owned by RMG or POL. The service will not collect records of their competitors due to commercial sensitivities. We recognise that this means that the service has a narrow focus that may not necessarily reflect all the activities of the businesses, particularly when it comes to its staff, or to historical events, such as the First and Second World Wars, suffragettes and the Windrush generation. We will consider, on a case by case basis, whether records or publications that were not created by either business but that fill a gap within the archive or

the story of postal history more widely should be added e.g. histories of marginalised communities and their interactions with RMG or POL, records of staff associations of serving or former members of staff, army postal services, the Covid-19 pandemic. These will belong to PHT and not RMG or POL. Any archive material acquired that is not created by RMG or POL will still be managed according to TNA standards but will not have public record status.

In the past, the archive received records through a combination of files from the Registries and Records Centre, transfers from the businesses and donations from the public and former members of staff and their families. However, with the advent of digital records, the decline in traditional paper filing and the privatisation of Royal Mail, we need to find new ways of ensuring that the archive continues to develop and receive records. If we do not, we will be unable to meet our obligations under the Archive Services Agreement, fulfil our role as the corporate memories of the businesses and tell the evolving story of postal communications.

We will work with RMG and POL to ensure that the archive continues to grow and reflect their role in postal communications and on the high street, and their impact upon society both nationally and internationally. This will be done by:

- Working with RMG to ensure a more prompt and effective transfer of paper records in accordance with their records retention schedules
- Working with POL to maintain up to date records retention schedules;
- Working with RMG and POL to plan for the transfer of digital records to the archive in line with the relevant retention schedules. Digital records may need transferring to the archive at an earlier date than paper records have traditionally been.
- Some records that are more than 20 years and that should ideally have been transferred to the archive are still with the businesses. The Postal Museum will work with the businesses to transfer these records to the archive.
- Establishing which areas within the archive are poorly represented and attempting to fill them. The archive has gaps in the following areas, and The Postal Museum is open to collecting more: records relating to the involvement by Post Office staff in the suffragette movement; employment of marginalised communities; records of staff associations and sports and social clubs; records of postal and counter regions; records of RMG and POL companies.
- Reviewing un-appraised records within the archive and those created by the Registries and Records Centre.

For further details please see the Archive Development Plan (available upon request).

Co-operating with other archives and museums

The Postal Museum recognises the need for co-operation and consultation between national and provincial museums, art galleries and record offices with similar, or overlapping, interests and collecting policies, and will seek to consult with other institutions, such as BT Archives and the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick, both on specific acquisitions where a conflict of interest is thought possible, and more generally on defining areas of specialisation.

7. Archive of The Postal Museum and its predecessors

Records created or received by The Postal Museum and its predecessors (British Postal Museum & Archive, National Postal Museum and the archive when it was a department within Royal Mail Group and its predecessors) that are considered suitable for permanent retention will also be collected. Records prior to the creation of the British Postal Museum & Archive in 2004 are public record, are owned by RMG and POL, and will be catalogued and made available as part of the Royal Mail Archive.

Records created by the British Postal Museum & Archive (which changed its name to The Postal Museum in November 2015) are non-public record, owned by the Postal Heritage Trust and will be catalogued separately. The only exception are the records concerning the content of the archive of the Royal Mail Archive, such as the catalogue, acquisition and loan records. These are created to fulfil the Archive Services Agreement and are owned by RMG and POL.

8. Responsibility for the archive

The management of the Royal Mail Archive is the responsibility of the Archive and Records Management Team headed by the Senior Archivist. It is part of the Collections Team. The Postal Museum is committed to caring for the archive on behalf of RMG and POL via the employment of professionally qualified members of staff.

9. Implementation and Review

This policy (approved by the Collections Sub-Committee in 2018) will be communicated to The Postal Museum staff, and to external agencies and others with an interest on demand. It will be reviewed every two years.

Appendix A

Royal Mail Philatelic Collections

Requirement of Collections

The Royal Mail Archive holds examples of all postage stamps and other philatelic products produced for sale to the public (via any means), and the various stages involved in their production. This includes new developments.

The following material is required:

- Complete record of all stages of the production of postage stamps, in either paper (such as a registered file) or digital format
- **Artwork for postage stamps**
All artwork in any media used that has contributed to the production of postage stamps including un-adopted designs.
- **Artwork for other products including postal stationery, stamp book covers, air letters etc.**
All artwork in any media used that has contributed to the production of other products including un-adopted designs.
- **Essays, proofs and Registration Sheets**
All essays and proofs for postage stamps and other philatelic products (as above) and registration sheets from each issue or, for changes and reprints, taken from the first day of printing and annotated with the date. Copies of any presentation issues such as Prestige Stamp Books are required.
- **Philatelic Records created beyond Royal Mail Group including contracts with printers**
Records produced by printers or any other suppliers for stamp or other philatelic uses once their use by the printer etc. has passed.
- **Minutes of meetings**
Agenda, minutes and papers from the meetings of the Stamp Advisory Committee.

Files relating to advertising and marketing, and administrative arrangements for press previews, for example, will be considered for permanent retention on a case-by-case basis.

Appendix B

Records held elsewhere relating to postal operations and telecommunications

Records relating to...	Held by	Explanation
Girobank	For further information please contact Archives Sector Development at The National Archives. Email: asl@nationalarchives.gov.uk	Girobank (known initially as National Giro) was officially opened on 18 October 1968. It was sold to the Alliance & Leicester Building Society in 1990 and the society was in turn sold to Santander in 2008. Records relating to Girobank are held by Santander Group Archives.
Government and postal operations	The National Archives (TNA) Further details on how to contact TNA can be found here: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact-us/	TNA holds records relating to postal operations that were produced by government departments, predominantly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is particularly the case with the Ministry of Public Building and Works (formerly the Ministry of Works and Buildings, the Ministry of Works and the Office of Works) which was heavily involved in the building of post offices. See TNA Discovery catalogue for further information (ref. WORK): https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/
Post Office Savings Bank	Contact The National Archives for further information.	The Post Office Savings Bank was established by the Post Office Savings Bank Act 1861. Although the Royal Mail Archive contains some records relating to the Post Office Savings Bank, the majority are held by TNA (ref. NSC). This is because when the Post Office became a public corporation in 1969 the National Savings Bank ceased to be part of it and became a public corporation itself. It is known today as National Savings and Investments (NSI).
RMG records	If you have a question or complaint about Royal Mail products or services, please contact Royal Mail Services at: https://help.royalmail.com/personal/s/	Records in paper form that are intended for permanent retention are not usually transferred to the archive by RMG until they are at least 20 years, except for some material such as posters and annual reports.

Records relating to...	Held by	Explanation
	<p>If you have a question or complaint about Parcelforce Worldwide products or services, please contact at: https://www.parcelforce.com/contact-us.</p> <p>If you have any questions about personal data or records held by Royal Mail that are less than 20 years old, contact the Information Rights and Governance Team at:</p> <p>Data Privacy Team Royal Mail Group information.rights@royalmail.com</p> <p>or</p> <p>Royal Mail Group Pond Street, Sheffield S98 6HR</p>	
POL records less than 20 years old	<p>Email: information.rights@postoffice.co.uk</p> <p>Write to: Information Rights Team Post Office Limited 100 Wood Street, London. EC2V 7ER</p>	Records in paper form that are intended for permanent retention are not usually transferred to the archive by POL until they are at least 20 years, except for some material such as posters and annual reports.
Telecommunications	<p>BT Group Archives Third Floor Holborn Telephone Exchange 268-270 High Holborn LONDON WC1V 7EE</p> <p>Email: archives@bt.com</p> <p>https://www.bt.com/about/bt/our-history/bt-archives</p>	The Post Office was responsible for telecommunications until that side of the business became a separate public corporation in 1981, trading as British Telecom. In 1984, British Telecom was privatised and, since 1991, has traded as BT. Records relating solely to telecommunication matters were largely transferred to BT between 1991 and 1998. Where records exist that relate to both postal and telecommunications these remain in the custody of the Royal Mail Archive.

Records relating to...	Held by	Explanation
		<p>From time to time, records within the archive about telecommunications are identified as being more appropriately to BT Archives. When this happens permission to transfer the records in question is sought from TNA, the records are transferred and a note about the new location is made on the catalogue.</p>
<p><u>Union of Communication Workers (formerly the Union of Post Office Workers)</u>, 1872-1995, and the <u>Council of Post Office Unions</u>, 1950-1982</p>	<p>The Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick</p> <p>Contact:</p> <p>Modern Records Centre University Library University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL, United Kingdom</p> <p>Email: archives@warwick.ac.uk</p> <p>Telephone: (0)24 7652 4219</p>	<p>The Union of Post Office Workers (UPW) was set up in 1919. It changed its name to the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) in 1980. In 1995 the union merged with the National Communications Union (NCU) to form the Communication Workers' Union (CWU).</p> <p>The Council of Post Office Unions was set up in 1969 when the Post Office ceased to be a government department and part of the Civil Service. At the time, the Council consisted of five unions: the Association of Post Office Executives; the Post Office Engineering Union; the Union of Post Office Workers; the Post Office Management Staff Association; and the National Federation of Sub-Post Masters. The Civil and Public Servants Association joined in 1972. In 1982 the Council was disbanded having been replaced by the British Telecommunications Union Council and the Post Office Union Committee.</p> <p>Source: https://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/collections/Tra de%20Unions. Accessed 24 November 2025)</p>

