

University of Kent

# Collection Development Strategy – Special Collections

January 2014

## Purpose and scope

This document sets the strategic approach for how Special Collections material is acquired and managed at the University. As such it serves as a reference document to guide strategic collection development and curatorial decisions. This strategy should be read in conjunction with the Information Services Collection Development Strategy.

This Strategy should be supported by a series of detailed policies for all significant individual collections held by Information Services. These should be made publically available as each is agreed.

## Special Collections mission

Special Collections manages the University's holdings of rare, unique and distinctive library and archive material that requires special preservation, access, or interpretation. It collects and develops such collections and makes them widely available for teaching, research, and exhibition across the University as well as collaborating with local, national and international communities to promote their use.

## The Nature of Special Collections

The material held by Special Collections is distinguished by content, format, and grouping:

- Content, ranging from personal letters and poems to political documents, play scripts, maps, and cartoons.
- Special formats in which that content is preserved, from manuscripts on parchment to printed books and posters, and formats such as glass negatives, audio cassettes, and slides. We are committed to preserving the special formats in which this content is held, where those add to its historical and academic value, are an integral part of that content, or add to its value for exhibition and display.
- Grouping of materials in separate donated collections, recording the activities of individuals and organisations, which are themselves of significance and need to be preserved.

Because of the unusual, rare or delicate nature of these formats, and the need to preserve collections, Special Collections has a range of services to help users work with original materials wherever possible. Through a supervised reading room and seminars and workshops we endeavour to help users gain the fullest experience possible of working with these materials.

The University's commitment to making its Special Collections widely available includes the use of digital technologies to make their content discoverable and deliverable alongside its other holdings, and electronically.

## Strategic principles

Information Services staff will work with partners internally and externally to actively:

- **Collaborate** on defining areas of collection interest and all aspects of collection development for Special Collections;
- **Lead development** of its collections by acquiring appropriate new materials and managing existing ones in line with the agreed areas of interest;
- Focus its collections on **people studying and researching** in these areas of interest, inspiring and supporting new research and creative learning and teaching;
- Maximise **availability, accessibility and sustainable use** of the material contained in Special Collections;
- **Ensure preservation** of the special content, formats, and collections held by Special Collections;
- Develop both physical and electronic spaces which **optimise the storage, presentation and discovery** of Special Collections materials.

## Collaboration

- Collaborate with all University of Kent academic schools and support services to develop the collections held by the University;
- Consult with partner libraries, archives, museums, galleries, and external information services, where appropriate, over all aspects of strategic collection development;
- Work closely with potential and existing private lenders and donors in the areas of specific collection interest;
- Collaborate with groups and professional bodies related to the areas of specific collection interest.

## Development

- Develop the collections in a range of physical and electronic formats, including born-digital items;
- Identify, respond to, and engage with the needs of the teaching, learning and research communities of the University of Kent to refine the areas of special collection interest;
- Raise awareness of the unique resources available to the University's teaching and research staff via Special Collections, through publicity in all forms of media, talks and inductions, to help embed the use of such material in their work;
- Seek opportunities to further involve Special Collections material and expertise in research projects, talks, lectures; exhibitions, displays, and publications

## People

- Manage the collections to serve the teaching, learning, and research communities of the University of Kent;
- Support other researchers and students nationally and globally to access, use, and publicise materials in the University collections;
- Raise public awareness of those collections of interest and relevance to the local communities of which the University is a part, enhancing their sense of ownership and involvement.

## Availability, Accessibility and Sustainable Use

- Acquire, preserve, and manage material and collections with the primary aim of making them discoverable and accessible;
- Prioritise work on making material and collections accessible for consultation, display, and reproduction, either in physical or digital form;
- Describe all holdings to collection level or below, and make those descriptions available through services that fit the requirements of the material. This should include general services wherever possible as well as in dedicated services for collections where it is appropriate, such as the British Cartoon Archive. Where appropriate we will share the metadata and images with local, national, and international discovery services, in order to further publicise the University's holdings;
- Provide access to the physical holdings of Special Collections under conditions that guarantee their safety and long-term use.

## Preservation

- Provide appropriate storage for Special Collections materials, whether physical or digital, to recognised standards and with appropriate expert advice, in order to guarantee their longterm safety and continued use;
- Monitor the use of the physical holdings of Special Collections, in research, teaching, or exhibition, to ensure that all materials in regular use are also available in digital form wherever possible, and that, where necessary, access to the physical original is restricted;
- Consider for transfer to specialist storage any physical material that cannot be adequately conserved or sustainably managed by Special Collections, or offer it for loan or donation to other institutions that are able to conserve it and make it available for study and use;
- Ensure the security of any physical material loaned by Special Collections to other institutions, and, where lent for display, obtain guarantees that the appropriate environmental conditions will be met.

## Spaces

- Work to provide attractive and secure physical and digital spaces where Special Collections material can be discovered, seen, and used;
- Work to provide attractive and secure display and exhibition spaces at the University of Kent, for showing both the physical and digital holdings of Special Collections.

## Areas of Collection

Special Collections seeks to support and inspire the learning, teaching and research activities of the University of Kent, and to promote the University's involvement with the wider community, by developing and refining its holdings. This development activity is focused on several identified areas of interest, which include:

- British political cartoons and caricature;
- Theatre, drama, comedy, and the performing arts in Britain;
- Modern poetry;
- British military history;
- The history of British archaeology;
- The history of the University of Kent;
- The history of the regions and communities of which the University is a part, especially the local history of Kent.

Development activity will prioritise resources to these areas of interest, and our collections will be continually refined in order to align them accordingly, under the agreed strategic principles for Collection Development activity for Special Collections. Specific management of each collection will be guided by individual policies which will detail the scope of each of our collections, our approach toward acquisitions and development for each and all aspects of operational management of these collections.

In addition to these identified areas of interest, Special Collections holds a number of collections that are not being actively added to, but which remain part of our holdings and are as such also governed by this strategy.