



# BT Archives

---

## Collections Management Policy

BT is the world's oldest communications company with a history stretching from the foundation of the Electric Telegraph Company in 1846.

BT Archives, established in 1986, preserves the records of BT and its predecessors and promotes access to the records and their content internally as a corporate resource, and externally to national and international communities.

BT Archives is located in Holborn Telephone Exchange, 268-270 High Holborn, London WC1V 7EE and its primary website is [www.bt.com/archives](http://www.bt.com/archives).

The preservation and promotion of the historical records within BT Archives

- provides a source of knowledge about past actions and decisions, which can inform decision making in the future
- fulfils BT's obligations under the Public Records Act 1958, as amended 1967
- supports BT in compliance with the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act 2000
- forms an integral part of BT's corporate responsibility programme
- provides legal evidence
- demonstrates accountability
- substantiates claims of quality and performance
- advances the study of the history and impact of telecommunications by providing a basis for historical research

BT Archives is a constituent part of BT Heritage, the corporate memory of the group of British Telecommunications plc.

BT Archives works with partner elements of BT Heritage, including the innovative BT Connected Earth heritage programme - a virtual collection of telecommunication histories, artefacts and activities on the Connected Earth website as the hub of a network of partners around the UK who care for BT's dispersed collection of historical artefacts and support each other in contemporary collecting of telecommunications heritage objects.

BT has given a public commitment to safeguarding its heritage in a policy statement published on [www.bt.com/heritage](http://www.bt.com/heritage). The Heritage Policy describes BT's overall heritage activity and informs the work of BT Archives.

BT Archives uses Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) *Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries; a self-assessment checklist*, 2002, to inform its collections management planning and progress.

BT Archives Collections Management Policy is implemented through its Acquisition, Preservation and Access Policies.

## Acquisition Policy

### Overall aim

BT Archives selects material for permanent preservation which reflects the development and operations of British Telecommunications plc, its predecessors and subsidiaries both in the UK and overseas, from the formation of the Electric Telegraph Company in 1846, BT's earliest direct predecessor, to the present day.

The collections include material of BT and its predecessors up to 6 August 1984 (the date BT became a private company). Such records are legally defined as Public Records and BT is responsible for their selection, preservation and public accessibility under the Public Records Act 1958 as amended 1967.

Records created within the company since BT's privatisation in 1984 continue to be selected for preservation by BT Archives.

BT Archives does not normally accept records of other telecommunications companies from which BT cannot claim descent or ownership, nor those of international or professional bodies of which BT may be a member e.g. International Telecommunications Union, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation etc.

BT Archives does not seek to compete for records with other repositories, and seeks to avoid competition, conflict and duplication of effort with external repositories.

Records are transferred internally from departments within BT group either directly or via BT Records Management. Records defined as Public Records under the Public Records Acts are reviewed and transferred according to a procedure agreed with The National Archives.

### Format

Material offered to BT Archives will be considered on its archival information value rather than its format or medium. Records are accepted in every format, including, but not exclusively, manuscript, typescript, printed, machine readable, electronic, photographic, microform, artwork and film. The only condition on format is our 'duty of care', that is BT Archives will not accept:

- material where it does not have access to the expertise to adequately provide for the records' preservation, documentation, storage or access
- material which through its unstable nature might create a risk to the collections overall.

BT Archives also accepts artefacts that add to the body of knowledge, and our understanding, of BT's corporate history.

### **Deposit Status**

Items are obtained via internal transfer, gift, purchase or in exceptional circumstances, loan.

Records from external sources are accepted only as donations or purchases, not as loans, except in exceptional circumstances.

Where an external individual or organisation is unable to dispose of its records or where the records are of exceptional significance to BT Archives, a long term loan will be considered in line with the Guiding Principles for Terms of Deposit (1997) (approved by Society of Archivists, National Council on Archives and Business Archive Council) on a case by case basis.

Any loan will be agreed in writing by the lender and BT Archives and shall be for a fixed-term only, renewable in writing.

All acquisitions will be by prior agreement. BT Archives reserves the right to refuse ad hoc transfers whatever the source.

All donations and loans will be confirmed in writing by either a deed of gift form or loan agreement as appropriate signed by both parties.

For external acquisitions it is a condition of acceptance that material will be available for public access either immediately or at the expiry of a specified period.

All archive and artefact material accepted by BT Archives for permanent preservation will be formally accessioned into the collection. Full records of all acquisitions will be maintained.

There is a strong presumption against the disposal of archive and artefact material formally accepted for inclusion within BT Archives. Any disposals will be undertaken with reference to the appropriate professional and ethical guidelines for the sector.

## **Preservation Policy**

### **Storage**

The storage facilities maintained by BT Archives comply with the British Standards Institute *BS 5454 British Standard recommendations for storage and exhibition of archival documents*, (2000) and as an 'official place of deposit for Public Records' (Public Records Act 1958 section 4(1)) the storage facilities at BT Archives have been declared as meeting the requirements of the Lord Chancellor and The National Archives.

Archive material will be stored within acid-free or inert packaging in accordance with best professional practice and BS 5454 to maximise its longevity.

BT Archives aspires to store electronic records with in accordance with British Standards Institute BS 4783 *Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in digital processing and information storage*, 1988 and The National Archives *The Generic Requirements for Sustaining Electronic Information Over Time*, 2003.

Electronic records may be migrated from one medium to another (eg mini-disk to CD) to maximise their long-term preservation.

A Disaster Plan for the recovery of records involved in catastrophe is in place.

### **Handling care**

Any special conditions or practice for the handling of any part of the heritage collections in the custody of BT Archives will be recorded on the catalogue record or accession database as appropriate.

### **In the searchroom**

Consultation of material from the archives collections by external researchers takes place in the dedicated searchroom maintained by BT Archives.

Researchers are supervised at all times, and members of BT Archives team are on hand to assist researchers in locating and retrieving the archival documents that they require.

Researchers are provided with supports, weights and advice to reduce handling and strains on the archive collection.

Surrogates of the documents (eg microform and digital copies) will be used wherever possible to reduce wear and tear on unique and original material.

BT Archives staff may withhold access to archive material where there is any risk that handling or display may cause damage to the document.

### **Conservation**

BT Archives undertakes a rolling conservation programme to identify material that is need of repair and arrange conservation work to be carried out by appropriately qualified professionals (usually a PACR (Professional Accreditation of Conservator- Restorers) professional as listed on the Institute of Conservation's Conservation Register, [www.conservationregister.com](http://www.conservationregister.com)).

## Loans

Applications for loans of archive material to external parties or institutions must be made in writing and must demonstrate that the loan party can meet the conditions of loan eg security, environmental controls etc as specified by BT Archives.

## Access Policy

BT Archives provides historical information to support BT's strategy, vision and operations company-wide, ranging from the earliest days of telecommunications to near contemporary information.

BT Archives welcomes external parties to undertake research using the archive collections in the dedicated searchroom. Through this facility BT Archives manages BT's statutory responsibilities for access to Public Records under the Public Records Act 1958, as amended 1967.

BT Archives is open to everyone although visitors under 14 years old must be accompanied by an adult.

BT Archives will undertake straightforward enquiries including identification of potential sources within the collections, but does not carry out research on behalf of external parties.

All researchers are required to show photographic identification, complete a Visitor Record form and abide by the searchroom guidance on display in the searchroom.

BT Archives supports the work of the Connected Earth partner institutions, providing information to enhance understanding and interpretation of telecommunications history.

BT Archives supports the principles of National Council on Archives Public Services Quality Group *Standard for Access to Archives*, 2003, particularly for those records in its care that are Public Records.

Archival material held by BT Archives will generally be made available after 30 years of file closure. Public Records held by BT Archives less than 30 years old are accessible under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 except where a FoI exemption applies.

Access to documents that are not Public Records (ie those created after BT's privatisation in 1984) and that are less than 30 years old - unless originally intended for the public domain - may be permitted. Such access will only be granted after formal application in writing, approved by the BT Company Secretary.

Archive material will not usually be made available to external researchers prior to the completion of cataloguing.

Archival material will be catalogued with due regard for archive professional standards, namely International Council on Archives *General International Standard of Archival Description, ISAD(G)*, second edition 1999; National Council on Archives *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names*, 1997; International Council on Archives *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families, ISAAR(CPF)*, second edition, 2004.

Artefacts will be catalogued with due regard for SPECTRUM: the UK museum documentation standard, 2009.

Library items will be catalogued with due regard for Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, second edition (AACR2), 2002 (2005 update).

An introduction to BT Archives and overview of the collections is published online at [www.bt.com/archives](http://www.bt.com/archives). The public catalogue is available at [www.bt.com/archivesonline](http://www.bt.com/archivesonline).

A range of activities and literature is produced to raise the profile of the archival material held by BT and the company's history and development.

BT Archives welcomes feedback from its customers and encourages the completion of Customer Satisfaction Surveys.

---

## Standards

### Collections Management

- Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) *Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries. a self-assessment checklist*, 2002

### Acquisition

- *Guiding Principles for Terms of Deposit*, 1997, approved by Society of Archivists, National Council on Archives (both now part of the Archives and Records Association UK) and Business Archive Council

### Preservation

- British Standards Institute *BS 5454: British Standard recommendations for storage and exhibition of archival documents*, 2000
- The National Archives, *Standard for Record Repositories*, 2004
- British Standards Institute *BS 4783: Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in digital processing and information storage*, 1988

- The National Archives *The Generic Requirements for Sustaining Electronic Information Over Time*, 2003

### **Access**

- National Council on Archives Public Services Quality Group, *Standard for Access to Archives*, version 2, 7th edition (final), September 2003
- International Council on Archives, *General International Standard of Archival Description, ISAD(G)*, second edition, 1999
- National Council on Archives, *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names*, 1997
- International Council on Archives, *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families, ISAAR(CPF)*, second edition, 2004
- The Collections Trust, *SPECTRUM: the UK museum documentation standard*, 2009
- American Library Association (ALA), the Canadian Library Association (CLA), and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, second edition (AACR2), 2002 (2005 update)

BT Archives Collections Management Policy was written with reference to the British Standards Institute PAS 197:2009 *Code of practice for cultural collections management*, 2009 and The National Archives *Archive Collection Policy Statements: Checklist of Suggested Contents*, 2004.

The Collections Management Policy is reviewed every two years.