



The Leeds Library
Collection Development Policy
May 2026

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1. Background

The Leeds Library's collections of some 145,000 (2021) printed works and archives began with the creation of the Library as an institution in 1768. Founded as a proprietary subscription Library by a group of Leeds citizens including Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), its original aim was to act as a wide-ranging Library for the general readership formed from inhabitants of Leeds. The Library became a charity on 1 July 2008.

A second Library collection commenced in 1779 under the auspices of the Leeds Foreign Language Library. This collection developed in the Leeds Library but as a separate organisation. The two institutions and their collections were legally united in 1809.

The collection quickly expanded, and in 1808 the Library moved into the current building on Commercial Street, Leeds. Galleries for greater storage were quickly added, and within 80 years the building had nearly doubled in size to cater for an increased membership but also an ever-growing collection. In 2025, the Library opened a further space in the building next door at no. 15 Commercial Street. This provides additional space for books, reading and events.

The collections are particularly rich in travel, topography, biography, history, and literature. There are long runs of periodicals, nineteenth-century fiction, popular novels, children's books, Civil War pamphlets and Reformation Tracts. About 1000 new books and audio/visual items are added every year, and a large proportion of the Library's holdings are available for loan to its members.

The Library's collection has items dating from 1483 to the present day. Generally, it has bought new books chosen by the staff and requested by the members, but from time to time, important works of reference and some antiquarian material has also been added.

The Library is both a vibrant social and research space and heritage organisation. The materials in our collection reflect many historical periods, very different attitudes, and some material which may cause offence to today's readers. As a heritage organisation we have to keep the artefacts and texts that tell the story of

our past. We do hold material that suggest that our members were historically relatively liberal and even radical in their tastes and preferences; we also hold material that tells a very different story. We do not dispose of material on the basis of its difficult subject matter. To do so would be to misrepresent the Library's past. We do, however, actively seek to redress past imbalances by developing our collection in new directions.¹

Together, the collection and building tell the story of the reading interests of a section of Leeds society over 254 years. It is Leeds' oldest cultural institution and the second oldest Library in the city.

2. Aims and Objectives

In the 1768 proposal to establish The Leeds Library, it was stated that 'None of the books to be sold: but the whole stock to increase perpetually ... so that, if properly encouraged, it will, at no great Distance of Time, be an Object of Considerable Importance'. These principles have guided the Library, although there have been a number of instances when stock has been disposed of throughout our long history. In order to meet the Library's charitable objectives, we have:

- To ensure the Library's collections are made available to everyone including researchers and other institutions.
- To ensure the collections are housed in appropriate conditions.
- To proactively conserve the Library's collections.
- To promote the Library's collections.
- To document the physical usage of the Library's collections including those items which are not borrowed.
- To actively research the Library's collections.

3. The Collection

¹ The children's collection is of historical interest, but readers are asked to note that the attitudes, language and some of the illustrations are very much of their time and have the capacity to offend. We do not recommend that child readers make use of this collection.

The Library's collection is classified into:

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Modern Fiction
- Historic Fiction
- Journals
- Non-Fiction
- The Leeds and Yorkshire Collection (in conjunction with the Thoresby Society)
 - Audio/visual items
 - PressReader

Each of these classifications are now covered in more detail:

Magazines

Magazine subscriptions are maintained and regularly reviewed to reflect members' reading tastes and relevance. With some exceptions, individual subscriptions are retained for 12 months and then sold off to members or disposed of appropriately.

Newspapers

The Library takes 'broadsheet' newspapers from Monday to Saturday when the Library is open. These are delivered by a local shop, and the Saturday papers are displayed on Saturday and the following Monday. Each paper is stamped with the Leeds Library stamp and displayed in the coffee corner. They are then held for 21 days for members' reference before disposal by recycling.

Modern Fiction

The fiction collection is one of the most widely used part of the Library's collection. After a fiction book has been part of the collection for 10 years, a decision is taken by the Library team as to whether the book is kept on display in the main Library or is

moved as part of a rationalisation process and shelved elsewhere allowing a modern browsing collection to be held in the Library's main room. The fiction collection should not be regarded as a complete record of members' reading tastes of the Library's period of existence, as for a long period of the nineteenth century, fictional works were hired in from commercial libraries.

Historic Fiction

The historic fiction (i.e. fiction published before 1950) is largely housed in the Library basement. There are significant holdings in this area, especially in nineteenth-century fiction, though there are relatively few first editions. Where novels were very popular, they were read by many readers and as they became dilapidated, they were replaced with newer copies. Nonetheless, the Collection does contain some very rare examples of popular fictional from this period which should be of great interest to researchers.

Journals

Journal subscriptions are maintained and regularly reviewed to reflect members' interests, relevance and overall strengths of the Library's collection.

Journals are typically borrowable for 3 weeks.

Library Non-Fiction Collection

The modern non-fiction collection (published since 1950) and the historic non-fiction collection (published before 1950) represent the areas of the collection that are of the greatest significance to the narrative of the history of the Library until the late 20th century. As a subset of the entire collection and considering individual items, the vast majority of the Library's most significant publications lie within this area.

Although elements of the collection have been disposed of at times, this represents the most complete element of the Library collection.

Those areas of the non-fiction stock that are a priority in terms of investing further in developing the size and scope of the collection are:

- Foreign Travel
- Biography
- Botany, Gardening, Natural History
- History
- Topography
- Bibliography
- Art, Architecture and Archaeology

We will also seek to develop our collections in areas that relate to our changing membership. Current priorities include:

- Fiction and non-fiction that relate to neuro-divergence
- Fiction and non-fiction that expands our holdings and understanding of Islam.

The Leeds and Yorkshire Collection (in conjunction with the Thoresby Society)

The Leeds Library became custodians of the collections of the Thoresby Society in mid-2015 and has catalogued and assimilated their book and pamphlet collection with the Library's Leeds and Yorkshire collection in the Thoresby Room. Together they create a rich resource for members of both the Leeds Library, the Thoresby Society, local historians and academic researchers. The Library and the Thoresby Society consult about which acquisitions should be added to the Yorkshire collection and split the costs of purchases. Any books that are purchased for inclusion in the collection by the Thoresby Society or the Leeds Library will be available for loan by both organisations.

PressReader

PressReader was introduced in mid-2020 and is the world's largest all-you-can-read magazine and newspaper platform. It includes over 7,000 titles, from 120+ countries in 60+ languages. It is a free service provided for members with the exception of those who have Access membership.

4. Acquisition

Selection and acquisition are guided by the framework laid down in this policy and by knowledge and understanding of the existing collections. The annual book budget is linked to the number of members; as the membership increases, so will the amount spent on books. Effective collection development requires professional judgement and the selection of non-fiction printed works, printed works of fiction, digital media, newspapers and magazines will be carried out by the Librarian and will fall within its acquisition criteria:

To be selected for acquisition, titles must:

- complement the Library's existing collection, be deemed an asset to the collection and add value to the collection in that subject as well as being of interest in themselves. If an item duplicates what is already held, the condition must be better than the existing collection or have significant bindings or other local interest.
- offer content likely to be of lasting value or interest to researchers in the subject.
- be well-written and accessible to the educated general reader, although more specialist works are also acquired in core subjects.
- develop new areas of interest for our readers.
- be mindful of changing needs as our membership itself changes.

The priorities for acquisition by the Library are as follows:

- newly published books, pamphlets, magazines and newspapers in print format as proposed by members and/or where the items are determined to have broad appeal to other members.
- historic books, pamphlets, newspapers, maps and magazines that complement sections of special interest or significance within the Library's collection or make good sets where volumes are missing in core collections. Acquisition of any historical items will represent 5 to 10% of the annual budget.

The Library will normally acquire a single copy of a title unless it is likely to be of high-sustained interest. If a second copy is acquired, it may later be disposed of by selling

to the members or in the regular Book Sales. The Library will acquire items in the following formats, and from independent book retailers where possible:

- The Library will endeavour to source hardback copies of books where possible in preference to other formats.
- Audio CDs
- Published DVDs of television programmes and films.
- Blu-ray discs

The Library will not acquire items in the following formats:

- Any form of digital publication or media other than published DVD, Blu-ray or CD, unless the digital format improves information retrieval, offers longer-term possibilities for space saving (eJournals, bibliographies, reference works, or provides access to materials not generally available or affordable to individual subscribers).

Some formats and categories are excluded completely or added only in exceptional circumstances:

- Large print publications.²
- Sheet music/music scores.
- Basic literacy and ESOL texts.
- Vanity and celebrity publications.

The Leeds Library may acquire items in the following ways:

- Gift (Bequest, Donation).
- Transfer.
- Purchase.

Gift

² Where a member has a particular access need, for instance, we will consider the purchase of large-print editions.

The Leeds Library welcomes offers of gifted material for its collection. Prior to accepting any such gifts, the Library will assess the appropriateness and the Library's ability to adequately care for the gift. The assessment procedure is outline in Appendix A.

Transfer

We may acquire material by transfer from other libraries, charitable organisations or similar institutions that fit within the acquisition criteria of the Leeds Library.

As part of the acquisition process, due diligence will be exercised to ensure that the vendor has the legal right to dispose of the item.

Purchase

The Library has from its inception purchased original printed books for its collection and this remains the principal method of acquisition. The Library will always look to maximise cost effectiveness when sourcing items for the collection. Where relevant, the Library will look to support independent and local suppliers rather than seeking the cheapest supplier 100% of the time.

When considering the purchase of expensive items, the Library takes into consideration the financial resources available and the possibility of additional financial support from elsewhere. The decision may be influenced by the availability of the items in another Library in the city.

5. Management

The Library will manage its collections in ways that maintain the condition and the quality of the collection. Each item will be catalogued and collated to the appropriate standards and be provided with appropriate protective and security materials.

The Library will develop and maintain a computerised collections management system for all its collections. Existing digitised card indices will be retained as a back up.

Books, newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and digital media published less than 100 years before the date of the loan request will be considered for loan and circulation to members of the Library. Those items over 100 years may be borrowed at the Librarian's discretion.

Requests for loans of any item within the Library's collection will be considered from non-members, libraries, museums, research institutions and similar bodies on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with the Rules of the Leeds Library Section C.

The Library will actively promote the collections to ensure that they are widely known and used.

The Library's classification system is a part of its heritage, and a careful balance is sought to retain its unique character while modifying and updating it when necessary. To this end, pre 1950 books will continue to be shelved using the Leeds Library Shelf Mark order or alphabetically by author (fiction) and subsequently by size. Post 1950 books are shelved by subject and classification (non-fiction) using the Dewey Classification system.

All areas will be clearly signed. Where possible the shelves shall be maintained at 85% capacity.

6. Disposal

As a general principle the Leeds Library has followed the sentiment of its founders expressed in the original proposal dated 9th August 1768 which states that "none of the books to be sold; but the whole stock to increase perpetually..." However, the founders of the Library did not envisage the huge increase in books and other printed material acquired by the Library, and the changing needs and demands of its members. It is now therefore accepted that, like every modern Library, the Leeds Library should have a Disposals Policy which will provide clear principles and guidance within which to work, whilst retaining an important core collection of quality, essential to our heritage and the city of Leeds.

Core principles

Decisions about disposal should always rest with the Librarian and the Assistant Librarians, exercising their professional judgement, or with other Library staff or volunteers working within their professional remit.

In the long term, therefore, we should be able to bring our collections into equilibrium by agreeing an optimum size for the collections and pursuing acquisitions and disposals policies which achieve this.

A full record of the material to be withdrawn will be kept in the Library's archive, the catalogue records changed, and de-commissioned books marked as such, so that the fact of their legitimate disposal and their provenance are clearly recorded. All items will be stamped as "withdrawn from stock" and their date labels removed in accordance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

The Library will continue to exercise disposal of material where individual items fit within the disposal criteria as set out below:

- Duplication: where multiple or duplicate copies of works exist and the work in question loses its currency, one or two copies of the work may be retained, if for instance where one or more are in reference collections or in poor condition.
- Condition: where an item is in a very poor condition and is unlikely to be a candidate for re-binding.
- Outside of CDP.
- Availability and accessibility in other Leeds libraries, or on-line as digital publications.
- Outdated reference works and other reference materials where information is both online and superseded.³
- Usage – items not requested within the last ten years. This is particularly applicable to fiction, and particularly if its appeal to readers has not proved durable.

³ There may be occasions when the outdated reference work has particular historical interest. Some works of that kind may be retained beyond what appears to be their useful shelf life.

- Is in an obsolete format, such as video and cassette tapes etc.

Methods of disposal/withdrawal

Items should be offered for sale, through regular book sales in the Library. Items should then be placed on a re-homing list, and be offered on our website, through our social media channels, in the Library's newsletter, or through contacts with other institutions, or charities. It should be available to the Books and Collections Committee for information and comment. Specialist re-cycling firms such as Betterworld books or Revival Books pay a small amount for sale books and each sale generates funds for literacy initiatives in the UK and around the world. A proportion of the profits should be re-invested in our conservation programme.

7. Conservation

The Library will employ on a contract or consultant basis the necessary experts in conservation, bookbinding, and repair skills, as required to maintain the condition of the Library's collections and wherever possible, experts will undertake training of volunteers. This includes the implementation of the Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Plan, March 2025.

Volunteers drawn from the Library membership will be utilised to undertake a directed programme of minor cleaning, repair and conservation works.

Expert advice and training will be sought by the Library at regular intervals to ensure that the skills and knowledge needed to care for the collection is up to date and relevant.

8. Storage

We are committed that where possible, the Library's collections will be stored within the Library building and basement, although external commercial storage is used currently.

Storage conditions will be maintained to the appropriate standards in line with the Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Plan, March 2025.

9. Research

The Library actively encourages research into and usage of the Library's collections and archive. The strengths of the research collection of the Library and identifying the opportunities to encourage members or non-members to use the Library collection for research will be detailed in the Research Development Strategy, a document endorsed by the Library's Collections and Research Committee in 2025.

All interested parties wishing to undertake research on the collection will be required to comply with the protocol for external researchers which is managed by the Library Team.

10. Review schedule

A review of the Collection Development policy will be undertaken every three years. This review will be undertaken by the Librarian in conjunction with the Collections and Research Committee.

Appendices

Appendix A - Gift Assessment Procedure

The Library appreciates offers of items for the collections but is conscious of its limited space. The Library reserves the right to decline any books offered if it is deemed that the books will not add to the quality and depth of the collection, or the items are not of suitable interest to be resold to generate income for the Library.

Any person intending to bequeath items to the Library must discuss their wishes with the Librarian and where possible, list the items proposed as donations to the Leeds Library. If the intended bequest is not deemed suitable for the Library to accept, advice will be given on other repositories for the items being offered as a donation for the person to consider approaching.

The Librarian will, with the donor, record any personal or wider histories or significance of the collection to add to the biography of the books in the Library. The Librarian will also note any wishes, information or instructions that the Donor may have with regard to their donation of books.

The list of potential donations will be assessed against acquisition criteria set out in this document.

A potential list of acquisitions, falling into either of the three categories below, will be recommended to the Chief Executive:

- Category A:** To be accepted as a donation and added to the Leeds Library stock.
- Category B:** To be accepted as a donation but NOT added to the Leeds Library stock. Where items are duplicates or are not considered appropriate for addition to the stock of the Leeds Library, the charity reserves the right to sell or dispose of those items.
- Category C:** To decline the donation.

The Chief Executive will authorize any potential donations that fall into Category A or B and report to the next Leeds Library Collections and Research Committee on the contents, consequences, and timescales of the donation.

The Librarian will liaise with the donor over the terms and logistics of the donation and ensure that the appropriate documentation is completed accordingly.

Arrangement will then be put in place for the donations to be transferred to The Leeds Library.

Appendix B: The Leeds Library Terms of Donation

The Chief Executive of the Leeds Library will authorise, in writing, to the Donor and the Librarian all donations prior to their transfer onto Leeds Library property or into its ownership.

Donations that are considered to fall within the scope of the Collection Development policy will in most cases, be retained and added to the Library's stock.

Once accepted, all donations become the property of The Leeds Library.

The Leeds Library reserves the right to dispose of gifted material that is in poor physical condition, is duplicated in existing stock, falls outside the scope of the collection development policy or that is otherwise superfluous to requirements.

Material deemed surplus to requirements may be disposed of by gift to another Library, by exchange of stock with another Library, by sale (the proceeds of such sales to support the development of The Leeds Library and its collections) or, if necessary and as a last resort, by other means of disposal.

The Leeds Library will catalogue gifted material, as resources permit and shelve them within the collections of the Leeds Library.

Unless the donor prefers anonymity, labels are added to each item received by donation in order to record the fact of the gift and on the catalogue record to provide provenance information for future researchers. Donors are listed in the Library's annual report in the year in which the gift is made.

Donated material added to the stock of the Leeds Library will normally be classified by subject and will be shelved with other material on the same subject. Volumes from a single gift will therefore not necessarily be shelved together.

Appendix C: Cataloguing Methodology and Standards

The Leeds Library uses the Heritage Cirqa Library Management software which allows access to the catalogue and its holdings from anywhere with an Internet connection.

Since 1998, all cataloguing has been carried out on this system.

Each monograph is catalogued to a high level using AACR2 cataloguing standards, Library of Congress Subject Headings and classified using the Library's own system and/or Dewey Decimal Classification.

The Thoresby Society's collection is processed to the same AACR2 cataloguing standards level onto the Leeds Library Heritage database whilst still being identified as assets belonging to the Thoresby Society. This allows the Leeds Library staff to administer under one system the entire contents of the Leeds Library.

A programme of reclassifying the modern collection (post 1950) using the Dewey Decimal Classification system has now been undertaken.

The Library will monitor developments in RDA (Resource Description and Access), the successor to AACR2 and look to implement if viable.

Fiction items are also catalogued in this way but to a lesser degree of detail.

Serials which have a local interest are catalogued to include the article titles and authors.

All fiction and non-fiction in the modern collection still housed on the Library premises has also now been catalogued.

All Items since 1998, which have been borrowed from the older collection, are catalogued after their return from loan.

Retrospective Cataloguing across all collections is ongoing. The main priority is to complete the cataloguing of the books in the Main Room.

The project was launched in order to ensure that the Library's collections are searchable and available online to better promote its holdings to a wider audience.

Signed

Jane Riley

Librarian

May 2026

Signed



Ruth Robbins

Chair of Collections and Research Committee

May 2026