

# Cataloguing Offensive Terminology and Imagery Policy

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## Background

This document should be read in conjunction with our **Cataloguing Policy**.

The General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) defines the purpose of archival description as being to:

*'identify and explain the context and content of archival material in order to promote its accessibility. This is achieved by creating accurate and appropriate representations'*

Spectrum, the UK standard for museum documentation, defines cataloguing as follows:

*'Such [catalogue] records give an at-a-glance summary or key facts and they can be indexed so you can find information when you need it'*

A key part of Jersey Heritage's work is to produce descriptions that not only accurately reflect and summarise the contents of records, but to ensure that these records are understood within the context that they were created, and to do so in a way that ensures that the descriptions are accessible, inclusive and discoverable, so that the records may be easily found and accessed by users.

Our approach to cataloguing is guided by international standards such as ISAD(G) and Spectrum, and is underpinned by professional ethics such as the principles on accessibility, impartiality, fairness and equity set out in the Archives & Records Association's Code of Ethics.

## Offensive terminology and imagery

From time-to-time, in both archive and museum collections, we deal with records and objects that include, and are defined by, what is now be considered to be outdated, offensive and harmful terminology and imagery. Just as attitudes have evolved over centuries, so has language and practices. These changes are reflected in records held at the archive.

Jersey Heritage recognises the importance of presenting these records accurately and factually through cataloguing to facilitate research into the island's history. However, we also acknowledge that some terminology will cause offence. This policy sets out our approach to describing and indexing records containing offensive terminology, opinions and imagery, and to facilitating research into collections that together seek to be representative of the totality of Jersey's heritage and culture.

We recognise that terminology and the content of records may cause offence for a number of reasons, including and not limited to: race and ethnicity, mental or physical disability, gender, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, and age.

## Approach

### Going forward

We aim to achieve inclusive descriptions that accurately convey the historical content and context of collections and preserves the evidential value of archives. Going forward, all new cataloguing entries for records that contain offensive terminology or imagery will be guided by the following procedures and practices:

1. Quotation marks around offensive terminology
2. Content warnings
3. Indexing
4. Contextualisation

Details about these procedures are outlined in further detail below.

We recognise that as views on acceptable language, terminology, and representation constantly evolve, our practices and approach must develop in time. As such, the approach outlined in this policy should be considered an iterative process that will develop over time. Although we strive for best practice, we acknowledge that we may not always get things right, and encourage users to provide feedback and suggestions.

### Looking back

Our ultimate goal is to apply to these procedures to all entries on the Online Catalogue, including existing or legacy entries. This is a large-scale and long-term project which will take a period of time to complete, and will involve:

- Identification of collections or series of records that are likely to present challenges in terms of offensive language or imagery.
- Reviewing and amending existing descriptions so that all entries adhere to the principles and practices set out in this policy.
- Re-indexing catalogue entries to improve discoverability of records that contain offensive terminology, views or imagery in order to facilitate research.

## 1 Quotation marks around offensive terminology

To identify instances where the offensive terminology used in an original record has been reproduced in descriptions that appear on the Online Catalogue, quotation marks are placed around any offensive, pejorative or harmful language. This is also to indicate that the terminology used is not endorsed by the cataloguer, Jersey Archive or Jersey Heritage.

Historically, the formal names of organisations, clubs or societies may have contained terminology that is now considered to be offensive. For example, the organisation now known as Scope Jersey, was formerly known as the 'Jersey Spastics Society'. It is important to retain the name as it was at the time the record was created for reasons of historical accuracy and contextuality, but also to ensure that the discoverability of the record is not affected. Where an organisation name contains offensive terminology, quotation marks are placed around the whole name, not just the offensive word in the name.

This approach is an extension of established practice to use quotation marks to demonstrate where the record creator's original language has been directly used in the archival description, and is consistent with approaches adopted by other services, including The National Archives.

## 2 Content warnings

We recognise that some terminology on the Online Catalogue, and contained within original records, might be considered harmful or offensive. To address this, we have a content warning on our homepage and some of our catalogue entries include content warnings.

These warnings are designed to not only make users aware of the presence of offensive language, but to also facilitate research into changing attitudes in Jersey. They aim to allow users to prepare themselves prior to viewing an original record, and to make an informed as to whether or not to view the original record if they felt that based on the information provided on the catalogue that doing so would be too distressing.

We will apply these content warnings to all new entries, where applicable, and aim in the long term to identify collections and records where the existing descriptions could be improved in order to better indicate the presence of offensive terminology in original records.

### 2.1 Statement

In order to communicate our approach to cataloguing offensive terminology and imagery, and to make users aware of the presence of potentially distressing language and images, a statement is available on the Jersey Heritage Online Catalogue acknowledging that offensive content appears in records and why such imagery or terminology are reproduced in the catalogue. The page containing the statement also includes a link to this full policy.

### 2.2 Offensive terminology in the title of an original record

Each catalogue entry that retains offensive terminology used in the title of the original record includes, will, in addition to the use of quotation marks to indicate language taken directly from the record, include at the end of the description, in square brackets, the following content warning:

*[This description contains terminology which is recognised as offensive. The terminology exists on the original record and has been retained in the description to ensure historical accuracy, improve discoverability, and to inform users on attitudes at the time the record was created. The inclusion of this language in the description in no way reflects the attitudes of the cataloguer, Jersey Archive or Jersey Heritage].*

### 2.3 Offensive terminology in the body of an original record

It is more likely that offensive terminology will appear within the body of a record. Although this terminology is not contained within the 'title' of the record, and would not necessarily be referred to in the description, it nevertheless forms part of the contents of the record itself.

Where offensive terminology does not form part of the original title of the record, it is inappropriate to reproduce the original wording in the description. Doing so is likely to cause unnecessary distress to users and perpetuates offensive attitudes and language. It is, however, important to indicate the presence of offensive language in the original record, and the subject or area about which it relates, in catalogue descriptions to facilitate research.

As such, you may see a content warning at the end of some catalogue entries, which will look something like this:

*[This record contains terminology used to refer to children with special educational needs which is recognised as offensive].*

## 2.4 Offensive views or opinions in the body of an original record

Sometimes, records may not include a specific offensive word or term, but nevertheless contain opinions or views that perpetuate false tropes or stereotypes or harmful representations, or which are otherwise offensive. Where this constitutes a major part of the document or object and if highlighting that opinion would help researchers to discover more about the attitudes of the time, a note is added to catalogue entries.

For example, for a letter written in the 1920s in which the writer perpetuates false and harmful stereotypes or tropes when talking about black people, you will see the following content warning at the end of the description:

*[This record contains terminology that demonstrates attitudes or views about black people which is recognised as offensive].*

## 2.5 Offensive imagery in an original record

In addition to the vast amount of textual-based records held at Jersey Archive, we also care for and provide access to a large number of photographic and other visual material. We aim, where possible and practicable, to digitise all photographic material as it is catalogued, and to attach a digital copy to the relevant entry to view on the Online Catalogue.

In the case of photographs, description is a difficult balance to strike in the sense that a single image may contain several points of interest depending on the disparate and various interests of different users. A single photograph of the cast of an amateur production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* at the Opera House in the early 1900s, for example, may be of interest for a number of reasons:

- The people pictured.
- The clothing/costumes/props used at a particular point in time.
- For illustrating changes in the architecture of the Opera House.

Just as offensive language and terminology does occasionally appear in original records, so too does offensive imagery. This includes representations of practices that perpetuate false stereotypes or harmful representations that are now considered to be offensive.

In the above case, for example, the photograph may also be useful as evidence of the historic use of the practice known as *yellowface* (the application of theatrical makeup by non-East Asian performers to represent East Asian characters based on approximated and stereotyped facial characteristics, mannerisms and behaviours).

Where possible, we aim to highlight where a record contains offensive, harmful or distressing imagery through a content warning. As a result, you may see notes on some catalogue entries that look something like this:

*[This record contains imagery depicting representations of the practice known as yellowface which is recognised as offensive].*

### 3 Indexing

We supplement the accessibility and discoverability of our descriptions for catalogue entries through indexing. Our objective when indexing is to facilitate the discovery of the records or objects by those using the catalogue by increasing the points of access through which a user or researcher may find a record. We index records by adding person and institution names, place names and appropriate subject terms that relate to the records in question according to the International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR(CPF)).

We recognise that users may search for records using index terms that either reflect the modern, accepted terminology that they may be used to using, or by using terms that are now considered to be outdated or offensive.

When using either current or historic terminology we want researchers to find the most appropriate records to assist with their research. To this end, we have:

- Inputted alternative, inoffensive terminology in the index field to improve discoverability for researchers who may not be typing offensive words into the Online Catalogue. For example, for a record containing the word *lunatic*, we use the index term *mental illness*.
- Linked index terms in the catalogue thesaurus so that a search using an offensive term will produce the same results as one using currently widely accepted terminology. For example, searching the term *lunacy* will produce the same results as *mental illness*.

Free text searches may also be used, which will find entries that contain terminology that has been used in the catalogue description because it was contained in the original record title.

### 4 Contextualisation

As well as identifying and describing the content of records, an important part of the cataloguing process is to explain the context of archival material so that a record may be understood within the context in which it was created. This principle should, and does, extend to cataloguing offensive terminology, opinions and imagery.

#### 4.1 Notes on entries providing context

We recognise that it is not sufficient to just use quotation marks and content warnings to identify, indicate and explain the presence of offensive terminology and imagery on our catalogue. To that end, where possible, a note providing context regarding potentially offensive material will be added to catalogue entries.

For example, an entry about a record concerning the organisation formerly known as the 'Jersey Spastics Society' will include a contextual note, in square brackets, that would read:

*['Jersey Spastics Society' changed its name to SCOPE Jersey in 1994. This change was in line with a decision taken by the national body in the UK at an extraordinary general meeting in March 1994 to change its name to Scope following recognition that its former name contained a pejorative and offensive term to describe people with cerebral palsy].*

Where offensive terminology or imagery is highlighted, contextual information may also be provided in the entry to further explain the presence of offensive content on the catalogue and to support understanding and research. This may include information about historic internationally-used practices such as blackface and yellowface, a summary of the history of the 'Aliens Office' or 'Lunatic Asylum', or an explanation of the local legal and historical context behind a witness statement in a court case where the official charge is homosexuality.

By providing context to our catalogue entries containing offensive terminology or imagery, we aim to educate users about the island's history while removing the possibility of misunderstanding the origin of the offensive term, and in a way that is visible to and accessible for users.

## **4.2 Research guides**

We commit to creating research guides designed to contextualise the collections we hold, help users navigate the Online Catalogue, and highlight collections that relate to a particular theme or subject.

These guides will highlight the fact that records on or relating to particular subjects, or specific collections, may contain language deemed offensive, pejorative or discriminatory. They will provide a list of keywords or subject terms, including offensive terms, that users and researchers can search to find records on or relating to these topics.

The guides will aim to bring together and list the various collections which may be of interest to a user researching a particular topic, provide background information and context to the records in question, explain the presence of offensive language and imagery on the catalogue, and provide details about how to search for a particular subject matter.

Production of these guides will form part of an ongoing, long-term project to achieve inclusive and accessible description and to facilitate research into collections and records that are aimed at being representative of all of Jersey's heritage and culture.