



Durham County Record Office

Access Policy

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Durham County Record Office

Access Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Our access policy exists to ensure that our collections are properly managed and preserved and made available in the most appropriate manner. It should be read alongside our other policies, in particular our Copying Policy, Digitisation Policy, Learning and Outreach Policy and Customer Care Standards.

2. Context

- 2.1 Durham County Record Office is the statutory local authority archive service for County Durham. We also act under agreement as the archive authority for Darlington Borough Council and as the Durham Diocesan Record Office for Parish Records. DCRO is an Accredited Archive Service, appointed as a place of deposit for public records by The National Archives.

- 2.2 Our mission statement:

Durham County Record Office collects, conserves, secures and makes accessible historical records relating to County Durham and Darlington to enable learning and education, business operations, local accountability, and personal enrichment.

3.0 Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all records managed by our service both analogue and digital: Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council corporate records and records accepted by us as archives from other organisations or individuals.

4.0 Policy Principles

- 4.1 Our Access Policy aims to make the archives accessible to all by breaking down physical, sensory, intellectual, cultural, geographical, social, economic and attitudinal barriers:

- in person
- via Enquiry Service
- via Copying and Digitisation Service
- via Website
- for Education
- for Community Heritage
- where possible and appropriate, generate income to help care for the archives

- 4.2 Our Access Policy aims to develop, understand and sustain audiences; to be aware of and respond to customer needs and changing circumstances, providing the best possible access within the resources available.

4.3 We are committed to promoting equality and diversity - as an employer, in the services we provide, in partnerships, and in the decisions we make. Our aim is to ensure that people are treated fairly and with respect. We have legal responsibilities relating to equality but we see these as the minimum requirement. We also understand the wider benefits of improving everyone's quality of life and our social responsibility. We have equality policies in place which cover employment and services.

5.0 Policy requirements

5.1 Access in person

We provide a Search Room where you can access original documents and surrogate copies of archives, finding aids (catalogues and indexes), advice and guidance from knowledgeable staff, reference books and the internet.

Opening hours: Mon-Tues, 8.45am-4.45pm; Wed 8.45am-8.00pm

The building is accessible and facilities are compliant with DDA legislation. Priority spaces in the search room are identified for disabled use. Equipment is available to assist disabled customers (for example, to magnify documents, change colour of text/background, motorised microfilm readers).

Access is free, but there are charges for copies of documents.

5.2 Remote Access: enquiry service

Quick Search: for short, specific enquiries by e-mail, letter or telephone, for a small fee.

Research Service: for longer or more complicated enquiries, for an hourly charge.

5.3 Remote Access: copying and digitisation service

We provide copies of documents in a range of formats, for a fee. Please see our Copying Policy and Digitisation Policy for further details.

5.4 Remote access: website

Our website www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk contains:

- Information about the Record Office, its location, facilities, services and the archives.
- An online shop, featuring events, publications, and to pay for services.
- All of our detailed catalogues of collections, with a free text search facility.
- Selected images to view online.
- Handlists, user guides and subject guides to the archives.
- An index to place names.
- A database of collieries in County Durham.
- An index of people working in the mining industry.
- Advice and guidance on family history sources.

- Information about each parish, its location and detailed lists of registers.
- The Learning Zone: educational resources linked to the national curriculum

5.5 Interpretation

We provide handlists, user guides, and subject guides to help you find the records you need.

We display exhibitions in the Record Office entrance, libraries and other venues, to showcase our collections, celebrate significant events, illustrate topics or highlight our projects.

We participate in radio and television programmes and local newspapers to raise our profile, publicise our work and the archives.

5.6 Access for Education

Our Education Archivist works with teachers and students at all Key Stages to provide creative, exciting and innovative learning opportunities across the curriculum:

- Schools can visit the Record Office for hands-on experience of original archives and to find out how and why we keep them.
- Our Education Archivist can visit schools for standalone or follow up workshops tailored to their needs.
- We create Resource Packs for all Key Stages and a range of curriculum topics and make them available for schools to borrow.
- We create online resources on The Learning Zone section of our website, where images and descriptions of the documents are provided together with suggested activities and teachers' notes
<http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/Pages/learningzone.aspx>

We charge for school visits and workshops, but resource packs and online resources are free.

5.7 Access for Community Heritage

We welcome group visits to the Record Office, to find out how and why we keep archives, to study your locality or a particular topic like family history. All visits are tailored to your needs.

We offer talks about our work, or particular topics of interest to groups, in the community.

We deliver beginners, intermediate and advanced Family History courses, and Palaeography courses, to impart skills and knowledge to participants to use the archives for a particular purpose.

We offer a range of events, such as Heritage Open Days and 'Third Thursday Talks'.

We hold family learning events in the Record Office and in the community.

We attend local and family history fairs to promote the Record Office and provide advice and guidance.

We provide advice and guidance, training and support to community groups and individuals about the care and management of their archives and related grant applications.

You can become a volunteer or Friend of the Record Office if you want to support us, become more involved in our work and take part in our projects.

We charge for some of these services.

5.8 Access Restrictions

Access to some archives may be restricted because of Data Protection legislation, the owner's wishes or because they are too fragile to be handled.

We will explain why you are unable to access any particular document and do our best to facilitate access for you.

- In some cases, if you can prove that you have a right to access the information, we can extract the relevant information on your behalf without breaching other people's confidentiality.
- Sometimes we can obtain permission from the document's owner on your behalf.
- Sometimes we can provide you with copies if the document is too fragile for you to handle yourself.
- In these cases, there may be a charge.

If we are unable to allow you access in an alternative way, we will explain why.

We can supply you with a copy of most documents for private study or non-commercial use. You cannot supply copies to any other person. If you wish to publish quotations from or an image of any of our documents, you must first seek written permission from the County Archivist and there may be a reproduction fee.

6.0 Standards

6.1 See Appendix 1 for statutory position.

6.2 The Access Policy adheres to the National Council on Archives Public Services Quality Group Standard for Access to Archives 2008
http://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/access_standard_2008

7.0 Roles and responsibilities

7.1 DCC Corporate Management Team is responsible for approving the corporate framework for the preservation of and access to archival records as set out in this policy.

- 7.2 DCC Corporate Directors are responsible for developing service guidance for the preservation of and access to archival records.
- 7.3 DCC Heads of Services are responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources are in place to enable compliance with the Access Policy.
- 7.4 Individual Employees are responsible for the records they create and will follow service guidance for the preservation of and access to archival records. DCC owns the information that individual employees create.
- 7.5 The County Archivist is responsible for DCRO's Access Policy, and will provide guidance and support to services and elected members in order to support its aims.
- 7.6 The Access Policy will apply to records created by Elected Members as part of their Council work.

8.0 Communication

- 8.1 The Access Policy will be published on the DCRO website.

9.0 Audit

- 9.1 DCRO will develop procedures to enable the effective monitoring of the Access Policy.

10.0 Risk Management

- 10.1 Without a policy and procedures for access, there are a series of risks:
- Damage to historically important records.
 - Restricted access to archives, placing remote users at a disadvantage, creating bad public relations and damage to reputation.
 - Restricted funding opportunities.

11.0 Review

We will review this policy every three years.

12.0 Contacts

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Appendix 1

Statutory Position and Standards

Durham County Council has a statutory duty to provide an archives service, to preserve and make accessible archives in whatever format they may be created.

Relevant legislation:

- Public Records Act 1958
- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations Act 2004
- Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978
- The Law of Property (Amendment) Act 1924
- The Manorial Documents Rules 1926
- The Tithe (Copies of Instruments of Appropriation) Rules 1960

Standards that are relevant to the management of all archives:

- Archive Service Accreditation Standard 2013
- British Standard for archive storage BS 4971:2017
- Information and Records Management Society Retention guidelines for Local Authorities 2003