



Durham County Record Office

Access Policy

2021 to 2024

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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 to meet the requirements of those using the service. 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 meet the needs and requirements of our customers, as well as adapting to changing and evolving circumstances, to provide the best possible

access within the resources available. This applies to both remote and on-site access

- 4.3 Equality and inclusion are at the heart of Durham County Council's vision and values. We recognise that inequality continues to affect different people in different ways. Under the Equality Act 2010, people are not allowed to discriminate, harass, or victimise another person because of their protected characteristics. As a major employer and service provider, Durham County Council is committed to advancing equality of opportunity and providing fair access and treatment when delivering services. It reinforces our responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Our Equality Policy identifies, 'to treat people fairly, with respect and dignity. We believe everyone in County Durham deserves excellent public services which take accounts of their needs and circumstances, and as a service provider we will ensure that all communities have opportunities to access our services'.

5.0 Policy requirements

5.1 Access in person

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, access in person became unavailable, which led to an acceleration of the modernisation of the way the service can be accessed, shifting the focus to access via enquiry services, online and digital means.

The record office is also preparing to move over five miles of archives to a new history centre. This process entails detailed surveying and condition-checking the millions of volumes, maps, plans, photographs, and papers in our care, to ensure they are properly packaged to move safely.

Access in person will therefore be limited until the history centre project is complete. Please contact us for further information.

5.2 Remote Access: enquiry service

Quick Search: for short, specific enquiries by email, 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 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.

We will provide information in a range of formats as part of a reasonable adjustment or provide information in alternative language, if required.

5.6 Access for Education

Our Education Archivist works with teachers, education advisors 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.
- Our Education Archivist can develop and deliver bespoke archive workshops remotely, via Teams or Zoom.
- 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 Home Learning resources on The Learning Zone section of our website.
- We create Arts Award workshops and online resources, including Arts Award Discover at Home:
<http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/article/25320/Arts-Award-Discover-at-Home>
- 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, or users with different needs, 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
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018

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