

Explore the Past
Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service

Policy on Access to Archives 2025-2030

The **Hive**



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1.0 Guiding Principles and Aims

1.1 Mission Statement

At Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service (WAAS), our priority is to ensure the proper management of Worcestershire's heritage for current and future generations. We protect, preserve, manage, record, interpret, share and promote the history and historic environment of Worcestershire. We help the modern county of Worcestershire to achieve its priorities as identified in the Corporate Plan; Open for Business, Promoting Health and Well Being, Protecting the Environment, Supporting Children and Families. We are striving to develop a sustainable model for the continuance and growth of the Archive and Archaeology Service in the current financial climate.

1.2 Policy aims

This policy details how access will be provided to Worcestershire's archive collections, both on-site and remotely, and documents any charges or restrictions affecting that access.

1.3 Statutory and legal status

WAAS is an accredited archive service recognised by The National Archives as a Place of Deposit for Public Records relating to Worcestershire. We are a service provided by Worcestershire County Council to preserve its own records and those of the wider county as the designated County Record Office. WAAS is the successor organisation to the Worcestershire Record Office which was established in 1948. It currently operates under the brand name 'Explore the Past'.

We are licensed to hold Manorial and Tithe records, records of local government and other public and statutory bodies. We have also been appointed as the Diocesan Record Office to preserve the records of the Church of England, Diocese of Worcester.

We are also empowered by the Local Government (Records) Act 1962 to accept privately owned records by way of deposit or purchase.

WAAS operates under the following legislation:

- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972
- Public Records Act 1958, as amended 1967
- The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR
- Tithe Document Rules 1960 and 1963
- Parochial Records and Registers Measure
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004
- Manorial Document Rules 1959 and 1967
- Copyright Designs and Patent Act 1988

2.0 General Principles for Access to Archives

2.1 Customer Service

Our 12 miles of archives are made available to our customers under the guidance of friendly, knowledgeable, and experienced staff both on-site and remotely. We treat all customers with courtesy and respect and make every effort to provide customers with a good customer experience. Our on-site team follow the 'WAAS Customer Service Standards' adapted from the wider Library Service standards used at The Hive. All important information about using the service will be communicated to our stakeholders on-site and via our online enquiry service in the most appropriate format for their needs.

2.2 Stakeholders and Audience Development

Access to the county archive collections is available to our community and stakeholders. These include, but are not restricted to, the people of Worcestershire, depositors, Worcestershire County Council staff and Councillors, Friends of Worcestershire Archives, WAAS volunteers, as well as all current and potential researchers (private, academic, and professional, both nationally and internationally) and potential depositors.

At present our stakeholders are over-represented by the over-50 age group and are predominantly white. We will continue to welcome our loyal customers but are committed to developing our audiences to maximise the benefits that access to archives can provide to wider communities within Worcestershire and further afield.

2.3 Equity of Access

We are committed to providing access and delivering our services to everyone. We treat all staff, customers and stakeholders with equity, dignity and respect, and value diversity for improving access to archives. We aim to identify and remove or mitigate any barriers to accessing our collections whether they are physical, sensory, intellectual, cultural, geographical, social, economic, or attitudinal.

Please see Worcestershire County Council's policy of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at the link below:

[Worcestershire County Council - Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)

WAAS's onsite services are operated from 'The Hive' in Worcester. Information about the access provisions for those with disabilities to the building can be found at the following link:

[The Hive - Physical Accessibility](#)

To facilitate access to our collections we will aim to provide:

- Advice about resources, services and tools which can assist with access to records written in Latin or in difficult handwriting.
- Access copies of records where appropriate for difficult to access analogue and digital formats.
- Information about accessing and using our services is provided via multiple formats including our online Visitor guide, Service Area guides and finding aids, printed versions on-site, inductions for customers on-site, and written or verbal staff guidance for researchers face-to-face or via our enquiry service.
- Equipment to facilitate access to our services and collections for example: magnifying equipment, raised/lowered table, hearing loop etc.
- Finding Aids and resources which comply with accessibility guidelines and the principles of SCULPT developed by Worcestershire County Council. Please see the following link for details.

[Worcestershire County Council - SCULPT Accessibility](#)

- On-line and remote resources where appropriate.

2.4 Problematic Archival Content

Access to archives promotes an open and democratic society. We are aware however that some archives contain terminology, themes and descriptions which may be considered offensive, unacceptable, or inappropriate today. If a customer identifies catalogues and/or collections which contain problematic language or themes, we invite them to let us know so that we can add appropriate explanations to aid future researchers.

3.0 Access at The Hive

WAAS's onsite services are operated from 'The Hive' in Worcester. This building was developed through a collaboration between Worcestershire County Council and the University of Worcester. Information about the building and visiting can be found on the Hive website at the following link:

[The Hive Worcester](#)

WAAS, under the branding 'Explore the Past', can be found on Level 2 at the Hive.

There are two main areas in which to access archives:

- Original Archive Area – access to original archives.
- Self-Service Area including a Local Studies reference library – access to microfilmed archives, local history library reference transcriptions and calendars, and archives available through 3rd party websites such as Ancestry and Find My Past.

3.1 Original Archive Area

Access to Original Archives will be provided free of charge at The Hive, in a secure area supervised by archive staff known as the Original Archive Area or search room.

3.1.1 Reader's Tickets

All customers over the age of 14 are required to have a reader's ticket in order to access our search room area while it is open for archive access. This is to ensure that we have a record of who viewed archives and when they visited. This can help us if there is any loss or damage to our irreplaceable collections.

WAAS is a member of a national reader's ticket scheme called the Archives Card. Customers should apply in advance on the [Archives Card](#) website and are required to provide two proofs of identification to complete their applications, including proof of address. More details can be found in our Visitors Guide and on the Archive Card Website.

Customers who have not applied in advance, or do not have sufficient ID to meet Archives Card requirements, are able to access the archives using a Temporary Reader's Ticket. Identification which matches the name given by the customer should still be provided on application. Only one Temporary Reader's Ticket will ordinarily be

issued to an individual every 4 years in line with data retention policies. Exceptions will be made to this limit at the discretion of archive staff.

We reserve the right to deny archive access to customers who are unable to provide any proof of identity.

3.1.2 Security

In order to protect our collections, it is a requirement that customers observe our security measures. Use of original archives is subject to observance of the search room rules and the 'Access to Personal Information Statement' which are both clearly displayed. We reserve the right to refuse access to archives to customers who do not observe these rules in order to protect of the archives in our care.

These rules include, but are not limited to, the requirement to:

- Provide or apply for a valid reader's ticket (Archive Card or Temporary Reader's Ticket)
- Sign our visitor log, and in doing so agree to abide by our search room rules and the 'Access to Personal Information Statement'.
- Lock bags, wet coats and any food or drink in lockers prior to entry to the original archive area.

Staff will explain our rules to customers when they arrive and monitor the search room area to ensure that the rules are followed by everyone. The security of our documents will always be our priority. However, staff will consider the accessibility needs of our customers on a case-by-case basis and rules which are barriers to customers accessing archives may be modified to accommodate their disabilities and medical conditions.

3.1.3 Good handling practices

Staff will be proactive in monitoring reader activities and intervene where necessary to offer advice on handling materials, including use of book supports, cushions, weights and other equipment.

Where available, customers will be required to view surrogate sources of documents online, via microfilm or on CD-ROM/DVD in order to protect the originals.

3.1.4 Use of Cameras and copying of documents

Copying documents is permitted, where the physical condition of a document and copyright allows. We no longer provide a service for the photocopying of archives in order to protect documents from the damage which can be caused in the process of photocopying them. Copying is now done through digital photography.

We encourage visitors to use their own digital camera or camera phone on-site. Alternatively, customers can make use of our in-house Digitisation Service by ordering copies from the search room or through our enquiry system. Charges will be incurred for taking copies, either through the purchase of a Photographic Permit in our search room or through our Digitisation Service.

All customers taking or receiving copies of archives will be required to complete a Copyright Declaration Form. This allows individuals to have copies of archives for their personal research use, under the Copyright Designs and Patent Act 1988. If customers would later like to distribute the images of the archives publicly, either through traditional publication and exhibition, or online (including social media), they are required to seek permission from the Copyright holder(s) of the documents.

3.1.5 Restrictions

Archives may not be issued if:

- Staff consider them to be too fragile, and further use would cause damage to the item.
- If they are affected by a closure period under the Data Protection Act or any other relevant legislation. This may extend to 100 years from the last date within a record if it contains personal data.
- If an owner or depositor has requested a closure period.
- If a surrogate is available on microfilm, CD-ROM or online to prevent unnecessary handling of the original document.

If an item cannot be issued, staff will:

- Explain why it cannot be issued
- Suggest other suitable sources or alternatives for use
- Where possible, advise on how to apply for permission to view the item including where to apply for a Subject Access Requests under Data Protection legislation.

3.1.6 Uncatalogued Archive Collections

Due to the time it takes to fully catalogue collections new deposits may not be in our catalogues but are in our 'Backlog'.

We publicise notable new collections we receive through the annual 'Accessions to Repositories' survey collected by The National Archives, please see the following link [The National Archive - Accessions to Repositories](#)

Staff will also advise customers of backlog collections relevant to their research both on-site and through our enquiry system.

Customers can access uncatalogued collections in our original archive area. We require at least 7 working days-notice of their visit to view these collections in order to

ensure that there are no conservation or data protection concerns before providing access. Depositors are able to access their backlog collections without requiring this notice period.

3.2 Digital Collections

We are working to provide access to our born-digital and digitised collections through our Digital Preservation project. We use digital preservation software to archivally preserve our digital records and provide access to the files. Access is currently limited to on-site computers at the Hive. We will continue to increase the volume of digital material available for our customers to access and explore options for providing access off-site. Digital Collections which are not currently available through our public computers are still accessible on request and given 7 working days' notice.

3.3 Self-Service Area

Alongside our Original Archive Area, we have a Self-Service Area on Level 2 at the Hive. This area is supported by staff during our Original Archive Area opening hours and on Mondays. Our Self-service area provides access to some regularly used collections whenever the Hive is open. It also protects the original records by reducing the amount of handling they receive to make sure they survive for future generations.

The Self-Service Area provides access to microform copies and digital copies on CD-ROM of original records. We also have access to some third-party subscription services on computers in the Hive.

Ancestry Institution Edition and Find My Past also have digitised copies and/or indexes of some of our collections which are accessible from home. Staff will be able to provide up to date information about our resources which are accessible on these websites. We have an ongoing project with Ancestry to digitise and provide access to some of our most popular collections through their website.

4.0 Catalogues and Finding Aids

Access to our records is facilitated by catalogues and finding aids. We use archival cataloguing software to provide access to our collections for staff and customers. All our most recent catalogues are created in our cataloguing software to international standards of archival description to ensure customers have enough information to locate relevant records. Access to our computer-based catalogue is available through our website. Catalogues for some of our collections are also available through The National Archives, Discovery catalogue.

Many of our early catalogues exist only in a paper format. Customers can access a paper slip index to our catalogues on-site, staff will also look at these indexes remotely on behalf of customers (see Remote Enquiries). It is a priority to make these catalogues accessible through our cataloguing software as part of our ongoing retro-conversion project.

Alongside our catalogues Finding Aids help customers to understand different types of records and how to access records on microform or CD-ROM. We have an ongoing project to review our finding aids to ensure that the information is kept up to date in an accessible format. Where appropriate Finding Aids will be made available on our website.

5.0 Remote Access

5.1 Websites

The Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service regularly reviews and updates our website. Our primary website is www.explorethepast.co.uk. We ensure that details about our services including but not limited to opening hours, service usage guides, policies and charges are kept up to date to facilitate access to our records. We maintain access to our online catalogue through our website to provide access to

details about our collections. It is a priority for new content, including finding aids, indexes, and information about collections, to be added to our website.

Some information about our service can also be found on the Worcestershire County Council website and The Hive website. We aim to ensure that information on these secondary websites is kept up to date.

5.2 Remote Enquiries

The Worcestershire Archive Service aims to offer assistance in research, to assist with specific enquiries and to provide information about our holdings with the aim of encouraging a personal visit to The Hive.

Information on our service and resources held will always be given free of charge, however if the search involves accessing original archives, microform, or secondary sources there will be a charge.

Remote enquiries are primarily processed using a website contact form which allows us to manage and answer enquiries and for the customer to pay online.

We will reply to enquiries via the post where requested, and if postal enquiries are received, we will respond by post if no email address is provided.

We will provide basic information, such as opening hours, via the phone; however, we are unable to provide detailed responses about research and our collections via telephone calls and will recommend that customers make requests in writing to ensure that we can fully respond to their questions.

5.3 Use of social media

We aim to use various social networks in order to provide up-to-date, personalised information on news and events from the service with the intention of reaching a wider audience and raising awareness of our work. Social media sites used by WAAS may include (although are not limited to):

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)

- Blogging and micro-blogging sites (e.g. X (Formerly known as Twitter))
- Photo and video sharing sites (e.g. Instagram)

6.0 Learning Activities and Outreach

Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service aims to engage with existing and potential customers of the Service, either on its own or as part of an activity organised by others. In doing so we aim to:

- Assist users to make the most of our resources.
- Encourage people to engage with archives, especially those who are not aware of the Service and how it can support them.
- Inform the public of what we do, the value of archives and how we can be relevant to them.
- To use archives to support the County Council's priorities.
- Provide fun and enjoyable activities for our customers.
- Promote local distinctiveness and the diverse heritage of local communities.

7.0 Customer Consultation

We are committed to improving the experience of customers using our service. We collect feedback through several methods to consider how we can improve our service delivery and improve access to archives. These methods include but are not limited to:

- Archive User Surveys (e.g. ARA Survey of Visitors to Archives and ARA Distance Enquiry Services Survey).
- Library Pulse survey.
- Comments, Compliments and Complaints cards in the Hive.
- Responses to our enquiry system.
- In person with on-site staff.

8.0 References

This policy should be read in conjunction with other related Archive Policies.

9.0 Review

This Policy was reviewed January 2025 and will be reviewed again January 2030 or earlier if circumstances dictate.

Contact Us:

By post:

Worcestershire Archive &
Archaeology Service
The Hive,
Sawmill Walk, The Butts
Worcester,
WR1 3PD

By telephone:

01905 822866

Website and Blog:

<http://www.explorethepast.co.uk>

Click '**Contact Us**' to ask us a question.

Find us on social media:



Twitter: www.twitter.com/explorethepast



Facebook: www.facebook.com/WorcsAAS or search for 'Explore the Past'

